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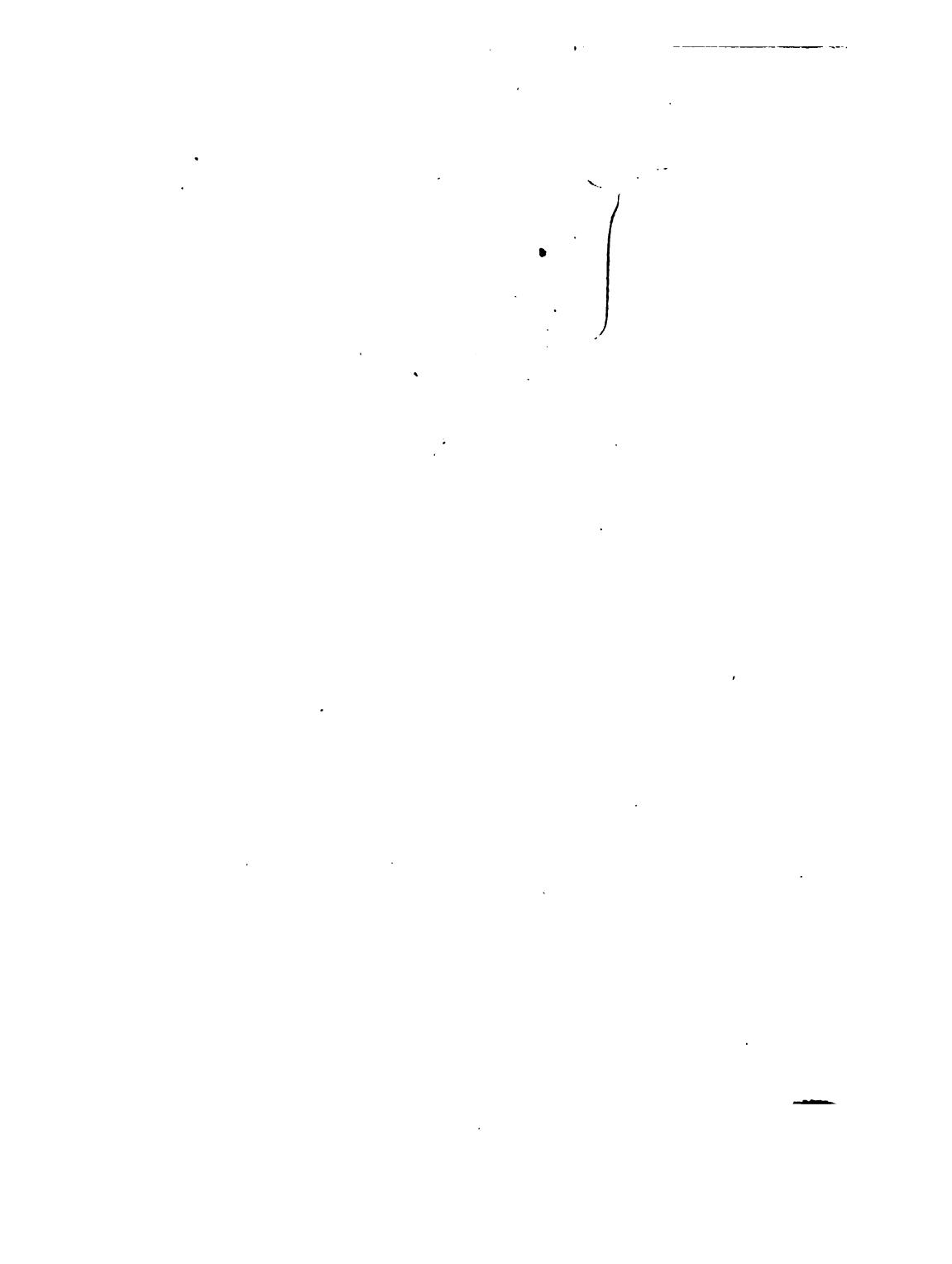
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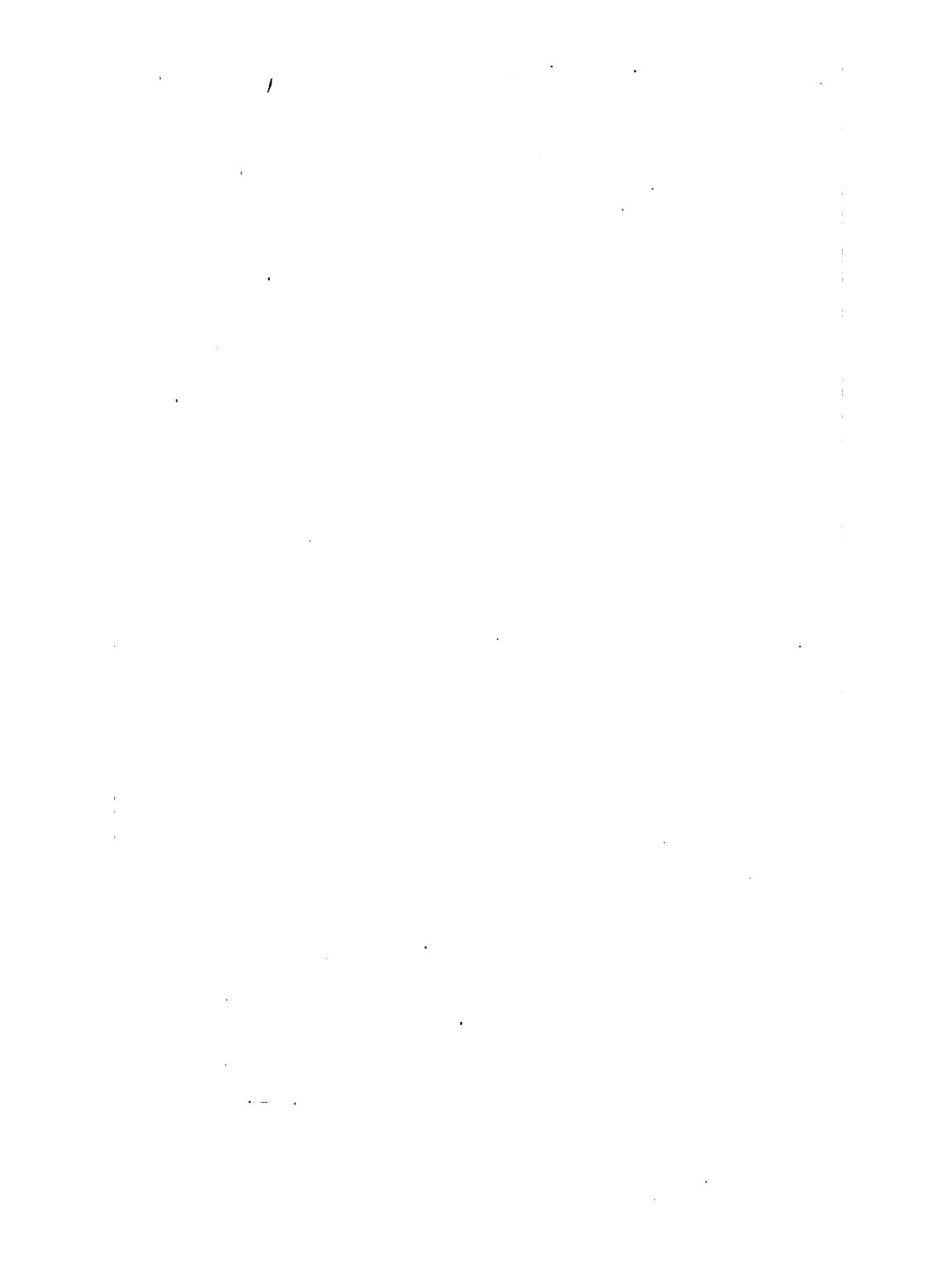
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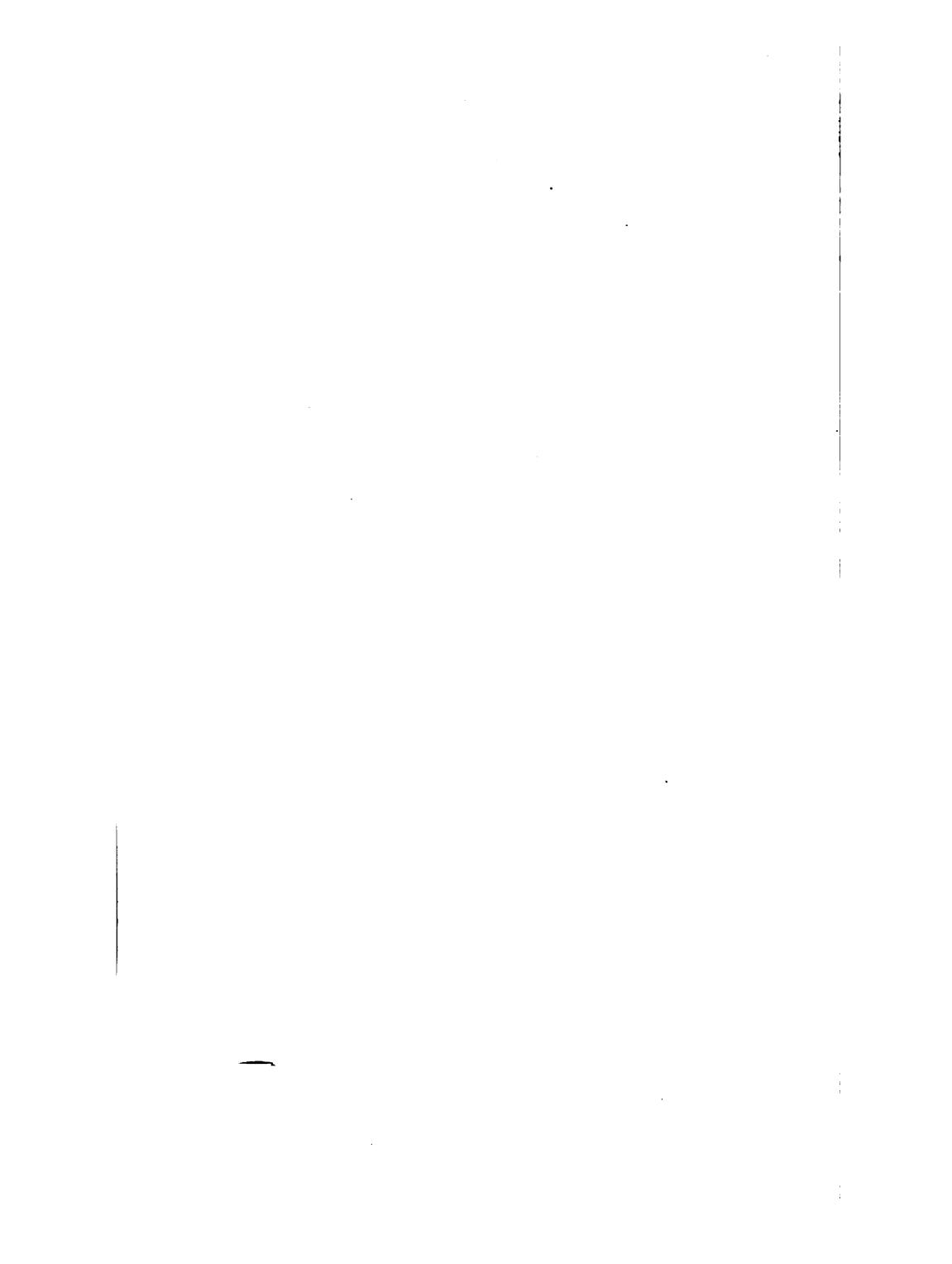
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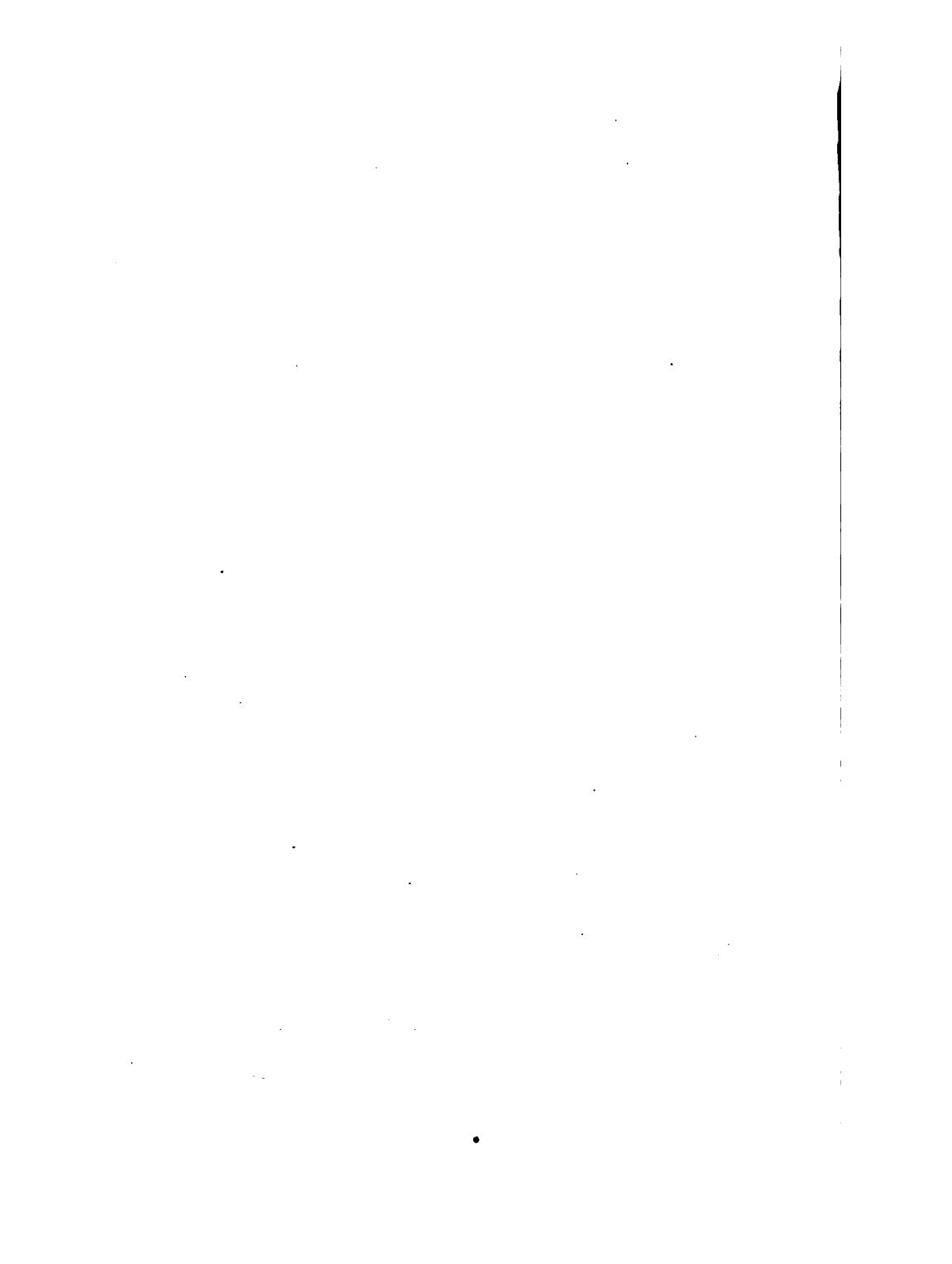












The
Barnes Family

A SMILE ON EVERY PAGE

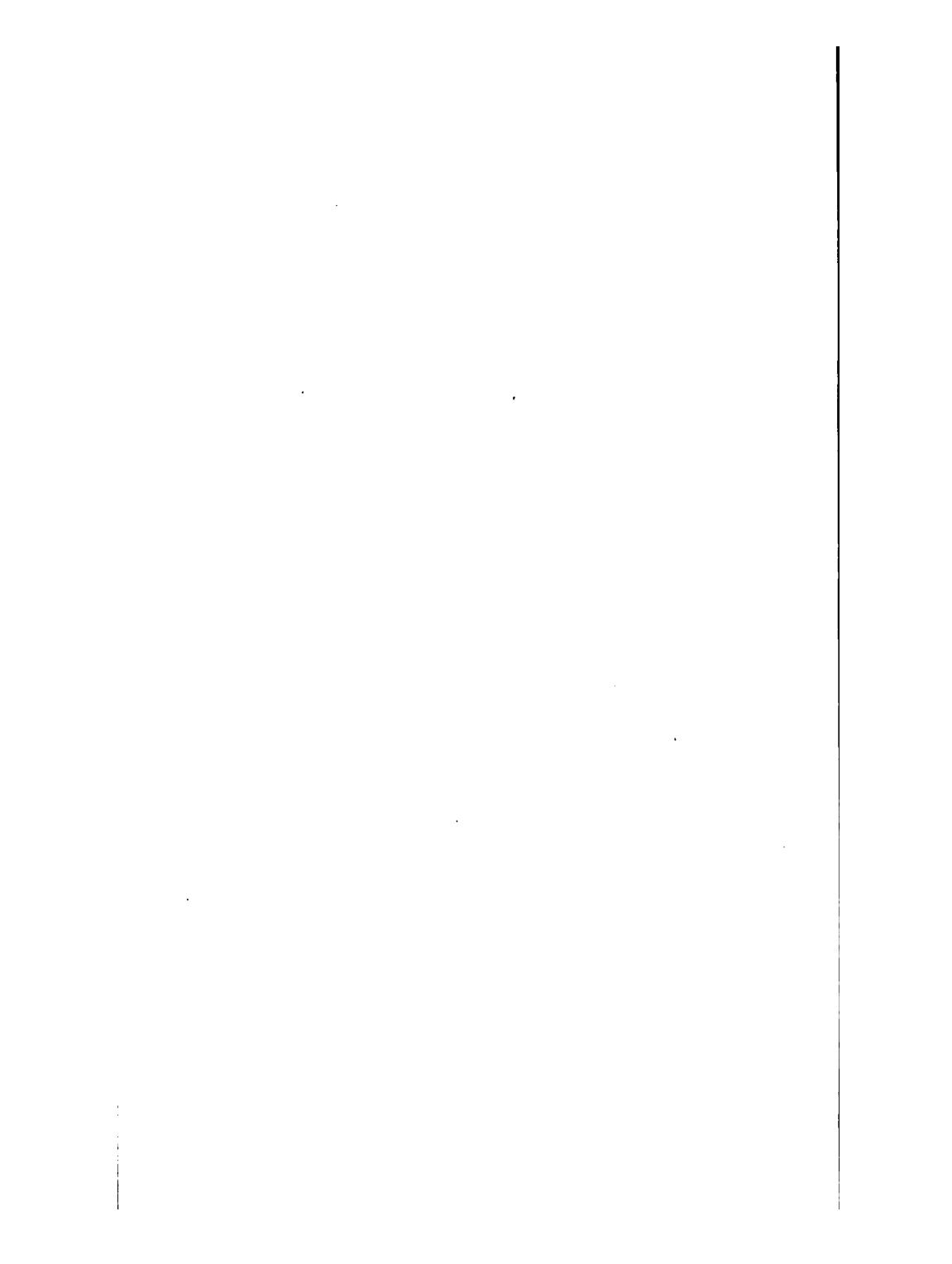
BY

FLORENCE S. CRAIG

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This little story
is lovingly dedicated
to the school children of America



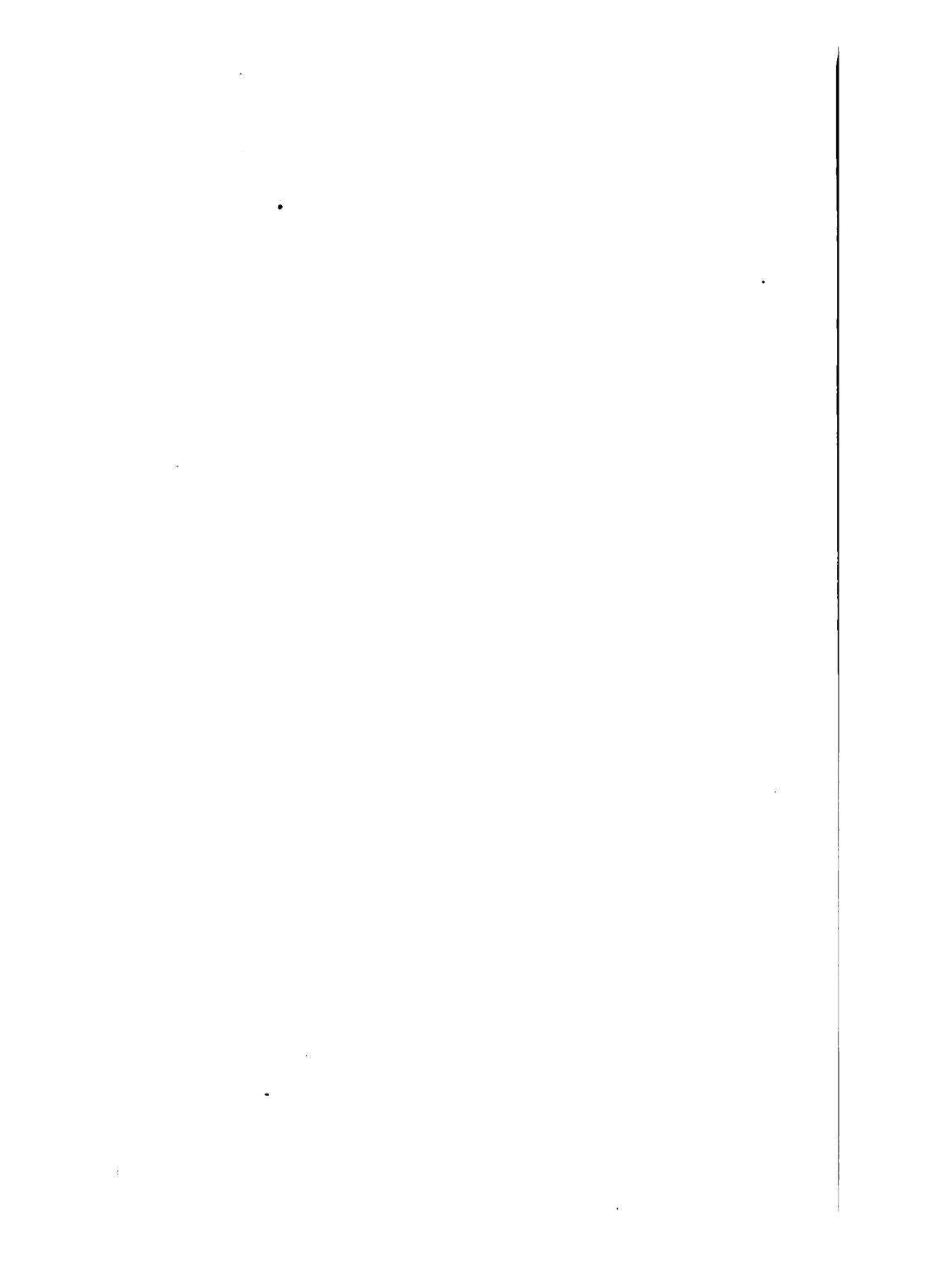
AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Who has not heard of "The Barnes Family?" All of us know them, if we will just think a moment. They may live across the street from you, or just around the corner.

What little boy who reads these pages has not a friend like Willie or Johnny Barnes—and what little girl does not know a Tildy or a Minnie?

And poor Mrs. Barnes, worn out little mother, you may hear her any day from your own front porch, calling out to her runaway children.

Oh yes, we all know Mrs. Barnes and her family.



CHAPTER I.

THE RUNAWAYS

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," said Solomon.
"Give him a capsule," says Mrs. Barnes.

"Johnny! Oh Johnny! Johnny Barn-es-es-s-s!" called the little woman standing in the kitchen doorway, shading her eyes with her hand.

No answer coming, Mrs. Barnes turned disconsolately back into the kitchen, muttering to herself, "I wish I could give Johnny a capsule every morning that would keep him out of mischief all day. It seems to me that in this age of patent medicines there ought to be something discovered that would make children mind."

Walking over to the stove, she began to stir some fruit that was boiling in a kettle.

"I see Johnny climbing over Bob Dale's fence," cried Tildy, her eldest daughter.

"Didn't I tell him I would whip him if he went over there again! I'll just have to wear him out."

"It don't do any good to tell him," said Tildy, philosophically, as she stepped out of doors to give some scraps to the dog.

"Ma, oh Ma! Willie's pumping water in his new straw hat!" she called back.

"Whatever am I to do!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes, sinking down on a chair and wiping her damp hands on her apron. "All this fruit to put up, and the children a running me wild."

"The baby's woke up, I hear him crying," said Tildy as she entered the house.

"Let him cry—it's good for him," said Mrs. Barnes desperately, still stirring the boiling fruit. Suddenly she threw up her hands with the dripping spoon and exclaimed, "Where's Minnie?"

Tildy, who had started to get the baby, paused with her hand on the door, a startled look coming into her face, "Why, I haven't seen her since dinner."

"She's run off, of course, and there's no telling where she's gone to. Do something, Tildy! Tell Willie to run over to Mrs. Nash's and see if she's there; and I'll get the baby—and if he don't find her there, to go on down to Mrs. Cole's—and not to come back till he gets her."

After these incoherent directions, Mrs. Barnes hurried to the assistance of the crying baby, while Tildy went to call the erring Willie, who was just emptying the last drop of water from his new hat.

"Willie! Willie! Ma says you are to go to Mrs. Nash's and Mrs. Cole's and hunt Minnie—she's run off—and not come home till you get her."

Willie, nothing loath to take a trip himself, put the wet hat on his curly head and started in quest of his sister.

Tildy, re-entering the kitchen, advanced toward the stove where the raspberries were boiling, ready to be canned.

"Tildy," came her mother's voice in a sort of a chorus with the baby's crying, "turn that fire out under the berries. I believe the baby's got the colic or swallowed something. He's a-gagging and crying dreadful."

Tildy lost no time in going to her mother's assist-

ance where the baby was screaming at the top of its voice, its fists doubled tight, its eyes closed, and apparently breathing with difficulty.

"Let's shake him!" cried Tildy, frightened.

They shook him and turned him this way and that, and upside down, and stood him on his head, and held him by his heels, and beat him on the back—and still he cried and struggled, though rather faint and weak.

"There's something dreadful the matter with him. It can't be colic! I believe he's turning purple," cried Mrs. Barnes, holding him up high in her arms to give him a chance for breath.

"Look, ma, look! It's that string around his neck, got pulled tight. Johnny tied it on him this morning."

"Where's the scissors? Get 'em quick, it'll choke him to death," cried Mrs. Barnes.

Tildy had a great time finding the scissors, but finally the string was cut and the baby speedily recovered.

"Poor little thing," said his mother, "I guess Johnny tied that string around his neck with the button on it for him to play with. Now, Tildy, we'll see what we can do with the fruit. Set the baby in his highchair and give him a biscuit. Dear, dear! the evening's half gone and I've done nothing yet."

"Hadn't I better wash the dinner dishes, ma? It won't be long till supper time."

"I expect you had, and after that you can spread up the beds—I left 'em to air."

Mrs. Barnes worked with the fruit and watched the baby, not realizing how time was flying until the recreant Johnny made his appearance.

"Johnny Barnes, aren't you ashamed to look me in

the face, when I told you not to go out of the yard again?"

"Well, I forgot, and Bob called me—"

"Oh yes, you have to obey Bob; you run right along when Bob calls you, but when I want you, you can't be found."

"I-I'm sorry—" Johnny shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other, and picked his fingers nervously, "I'll try to remember, but—where's Willie?" adroitly changing the subject.

"Willie—law me!" and the unhappy mother raised her preserving spoon in the air and gasped.

"Tildy, Tildy,—what's become of them children? I forgot all about 'em."

The eldest daughter came into the room, saying, "They ought to be here by this time. Send Johnny after them."

"Well!" eyeing the boy over hurriedly. "Johnny ought to have a whipping if I keep my word—but I haven't time to whip him now. So let him go and get the children. I'll try to remember it before bed-time."

"Where are they at?" asked Johnny, looking somewhat relieved, and yet a little anxious.

"How do I know? Go to Mrs. Nash's first, and then Mrs. Cole's—Tildy! Tildy! the baby's choking again. See what he's got in his mouth!"

Tildy rushed toward the gagging infant and extracted from his mouth a white marble she had given him to play with.

"There now, don't give him any more marbles or anything else he can choke on. It looks like he's bound to choke before the day is ended. I never had such a

time. If anything happens to the children, your father always blames me, and I'm just as careful as can be."

Johnny, having taken his departure, Mrs. Barnes again turned her attention to the fruit, while Tildy sauntered out into the back yard with the baby.

The sun was getting low as the weary housewife put away her last jar of berries, and stepping to the kitchen door, saw her daughter Tildy, her one solace, comfort and help, softly crooning the baby to sleep.

"Sh, sh," putting up her hand in warning, lest her mother should wake the child.

"Wait, I'll fix his crib," said Mrs. Barnes, stepping softly in front of the little nurse as she carried her charge into the house.

"Isn't he sweet?" whispered Tildy, looking lovingly down upon her baby brother as he lay asleep on his pillow.

"I believe he's the prettiest child I've got," said Mrs. Barnes adoringly, without any thought of the child she was addressing.

"No, Minnie's the prettiest," said Tildy.

Minnie! oh where is she? Where are they all—all the children?" wailed Mrs. Barnes, a flood of recollection coming over her. "They're all gone!"

"Why ma, where can they be? I'll go after them," said Tildy; and scarcely waiting for an answer from her bewildered mother, she snatched her sunbonnet and left the house.

"There's no use in worrying, I know Tildy'll find them, and I'd just as well get supper," mused Mrs. Barnes, philosophically.

Meanwhile Tildy was running down the sidewalk toward the home of Mrs. Nash, her bonnet well over her

eyes, intent over the object of her journey, and not observing, ran against a man who was coming toward her.

"Hi, Tildy, excuse me! What's the matter now? What's your hurry?"

"Oh, Mr. Howard—the children have all run off, all but the baby!"

"Well," quizzically, "and you seem to be running off too."

"I'm—I'm going after them. Have you seen any of them anywhere?"

"Not a one, but I'll look out for the baby as I go by."

Mr. Howard was a neighbor, who knew the peculiarities of the Barnes children and was often entertained by their remarkable escapades. When an unusual commotion was heard in the street, when the chickens were squawking or dogs barking, "It's the Barnes children," his wife would say, and think no more about it.

But sometimes matters would reach such a crisis as to demand investigation; for instance, when Willie got into the cow-lot and the yearling calf ran him around and butted at him until he got caught between two planks in the fence, as he tried to make his escape. On another occasion, Mrs. Howard's nerves had received quite a shock by hearing a most strange and unearthly noise close by her bed-room window. It was something between a warwhoop and a gurgle, and repeated several times. Afraid to put her head out of the window, she rushed around the house and saw Johnny Barnes standing in a listening attitude with his hands to his mouth like a horn. "What on earth are you doing, Johnny Barnes?" she asked.

"It's a call, I'm a calling Bob Dale. That's the way we call."

As Tildy neared the Nash residence, she neither saw nor heard anything of the children. Approaching the open door of the house, she saw Mrs. Nash sitting by the window, sewing in hand.

"Oh, Mrs. Nash, have you seen anything of the children? They're all gone!" exclaimed Tildy.

"Minnie was here early in the afternoon and I supposed she had gone home till Willie and Johnny came after her."

"But where are they—where do you suppose they are?" broke in Tildy hurriedly.

"They're probably over to Mrs. Dale's, playing with the children."

Without waiting to parley further, the child started down the street almost on a run. She expected to hear shouting and laughing as she neared the Dale premises, but again she was disappointed. The front door was closed and there was no sign of the family being at home. Nevertheless she knocked loudly and stood hopelessly waiting. Finally she went around to the back porch and found all closed up there.

"Of course they're not here," she murmured to herself, "but where can they be? I don't believe they'd go anywhere else. I might try Mrs. Baker's, but I don't see how Minnie could ever find her way over there—and what's become of Willie and Johnny?"

Tildy was becoming alarmed.

It was a quarter of a mile to Mrs. Baker's, who lived on the outskirts of the town, but the anxious child lost little time in making the distance; the thought of

the night coming on and the children lost, lent wings to her feet.

Long before she reached Mrs. Baker's yard, she strained her eyes to see if there were children in it, but as before, was doomed to disappointment. The house door was also closed, there was no sound about the place—her heart sank.

"There is no use looking in the back yard, but I'll try it anyway," she thought.

Around the house she walked, out toward the stable, down through the orchard, but no sign of the children.

"Whatever am I to do?" she said, using her mother's expression; and in desperation she raised her voice and cried as loud as she could.

"Johnny! Willie! Minnie!"

No answer. Again she called, louder than before, thinking they might be in the timber by the river that ran not far from that place.

And then the thought of the river terrified her. It was a small but treacherous stream that ran not far from the town.

"Johnny! Johnny! Johnny!" she called again, running into the road and starting toward the river.

She was so much excited she did not see a lady approaching till she heard—

"Tildy! Tildy!"

Gasping for breath, the girl stopped.

"Oh, Mrs. Baker, is that you? Where's the children? I'm hunting them. Do you know anything about them?"

"Why, no, I've been away all afternoon, and left Harry and Carrie to keep house. Aren't they home?"

"No, nobody's there—and I've called and called—and maybe they've gone to the river."

Mrs. Baker's face took on an anxious expression.

"I'm afraid they have. They found an old leaky skiff down by the creek yesterday, and they may have gone there to play. They begged to go this morning."

The creek was about a quarter of a mile from the house; further on down it emptied into the river.

Without more ado they both started in that direction. Tildy relating on the way how Minnie happened to run off, and Johnny and Willie were sent after her.

"They may not be there, Mrs. Baker," said Tildy, "and what will I do if they are not?"

"Hush, child, you'll find them somewhere. I cautioned my children to stay about the house, never dreaming they would go down to that old skiff when I was away—but as you say, they may not be there."

Just as they reached the timber, the sound of childish voices reached them.

"They're there!" cried Tildy. "Oh, if they're just not drowned!"

"They're not drowned, or they wouldn't be hollowing like that," said Mrs. Baker, increasing her pace.

Then the sight of the children came before them in the dim light of the after sunset; three of them seated in the old skiff, two hauling it down-stream. Little Minnie had begun to cry, but the rest were shouting with laughter.

"Harry Baker!" called the irate mother.

At the sound of her voice the shouting ceased, and all the little faces, full of consternation and dismay, not to say fear, were turned toward them. The two boys

stopped towing the boat, and all were silent, except little Minnie, who still cried feebly.

"Oh, Johnny," cried Tildy, rushing to the water's edge, "why didn't you bring the children home? Mother'll be scared to death."

Johnny made no answer, but hauled the boat to shore, where the children scrambled out, forgetting in their haste all about Minnie till Tildy called them to carry her.

"Oh Tildy—I's glad 'oo tum. I fraid of water," cried Minnie, hiding her face in her sister's skirts.

"Harry and Carrie Baker, didn't I tell you to stay around the house till I came home?"

No answer was given, but two little heads hung very low, and the party of condemned looking children turned their reluctant steps homeward.

Little Minnie cried as the darkness came on, and Johnny and Tildy took turn about carrying her.

"Whatever made you boys go down there?" asked Tildy, putting Minnie down so she could rest and breathe a bit.

"Well, I went to Mrs. Nash's, and she said she sposed Willie an' Minnie wuz at Mrs. Cole's, an' I went there, an' they wuzn't nobody to home, an' then I thought I'd go to Mrs. Baker's, an' there they wuz just startin' down to see the skiff, an' I went along—an' an'—"

"There's Pa now, coming to hunt us," said Tildy, as a tall man, dressed in laboring clothes, came suddenly into view, and back of him a few yards, was Mrs. Barnes carrying the baby.

"What's the matter? Where have you been?" he cried, reaching out his arms to Minnie, who gave a glad cry and hugged him close.

Just then Mr. Howard, who had heard of the trouble, and started out as one of a searching party, arrived upon the scene.

"Rounded 'em all up, have you? Where did you find 'em, Tildy?" he asked.

"Down at the creek in the skiff," she replied, and then followed explanations on the homeward way.

"And to think I sent one child after another till they were all gone, and me and the baby had to go and hunt them," observed Mrs. Barnes to nobody in particular.

"It was certainly a case of the whole family," said Mr. Howard, as he courteously opened the Barnes gate for the procession to pass through; but Johnny and Willie hung back.

"Aren't you going in?" asked Mr. Howard.

"They'd better come in," said Pa Barnes.

"I owe Johnny two now," sighed Ma Barnes.

"Be sure and say your prayers tonight, boys," called back Mr. Howard, as he wended his way to his domicile next door.

CHAPTER II.

THE BABY

Another baby Barnes had arrived in the home nest, not that the nest was very spacious or well feathered—not that Mrs. Barnes needed another baby, or had time or talent to devote to it; but there it was, not to be denied, as fine and healthy an infant as if it had been the only heir of a millionaire.

Tildy adored it. Her little mother heart was big enough for the whole family, no matter how much it multiplied, and her childish feet never grew weary of waiting on her mother and running down the other children.

Of course they had a hired girl, or rather a hired maiden lady, who said she would come and look after the children and cook, but of course she couldn't be expected to nurse a case of that kind. So Mrs. Howard came over every day and washed and dressed the baby, and made Mrs. Barnes comfortable.

Miss Abbie Dobbs had lived in the little town so long and worked in so many families that she seemed to belong to the place as a sort of public charge. When any one was sick or extra help needed for an extra occasion, "Send for Miss Abbie," was the cry. And so she was passed around from place to place, working for small wages and giving indifferent service, not being skilled in any way. Her age was an uncertainty that no one dared to speak about. In appearance she was

lean and lank; her hair was sprinkled with gray and worn in a knot at the back of her head. She was low-spirited, good hearted and faithful, but slow. She had to rise at four o'clock in the morning in order to get Mr. Barnes' breakfast ready by six.

"Ma, I can't find Minnie's stocking, and Willie won't button his shoes," said Tildy one morning while Mrs. Barnes was still convalescent, and her eldest child was trying to get the younger ones dressed for breakfast.

"Children, what in the world ails you this morning? You've been an hour trying to dress, I do believe, and the baby," here she checked herself, "I mean little Teddy—we must stop calling him the baby now—will wake up in a few minutes and then Tildy can't take him unless you are ready for breakfast."

"The biscuits are getting cold," said Miss Abbie, poking her head in at the door, as a gentle reminder that she was tired of waiting breakfast for them, the father having gone to his work an hour ago.

"Yes, we're coming, Miss Abbie," said Tildy; but just then Teddy awoke and raised a battle cry.

"There now, Tildy, I told you so," said her parent. "I'll take him, Mrs. Barnes," said Miss Abbie, "I'm not handy with children, but I can make out with 'em once in a while. Are these his clothes?" taking up a little bundle of small wear that lay on a chair.

Teddy was not familiar with Miss Abbie, and continued to cry at the top of his voice.

"It seems like I can't get his arms in the sleeves, he stiffens and crooks 'em up so—and oh, he's kicking and clawing me!"

Teddy was literally clawing and pounding Miss Abbie's face, with his plump fists.

"Whatever will you do with him? Call Tildy, you can't dress him," cried the distracted mother.

"No, let Tildy eat her breakfast. I've got his sleeve on now."

Finally the warlike Teddy calmed down sufficiently to be dressed and placed in his high-chair, where he was given a little tin dish of oatmeal, which he began to eat with a spoon, and ended by feeding himself with his hands and turning the plate over his head.

Those were busy days at the Barnes home and Tildy had to be kept out of school for two weeks.

"I do believe the children would run me wild and get burnt up, if it wasn't for Tildy," said Mrs. Barnes, adding, "Miss Abbie is good, but she's so slow."

In time the mother was able to be about and resume her household duties; that is, in part, for Miss Abbie still remained for her keep, not having any other place offered her. She really made herself very useful, developing surprising ability in the care and management of the children, for a person "who was not handy with 'em," as she expressed it. Teddy was the only one who resisted her overtures, and he was very excusable, considering that his little nose was out of joint, and he had so recently resigned his right of babyhood and his place in bed.

Minnie followed Miss Abbie about, regarding her with real affection, often climbing up into her lap and "picking the wrinkles out of her face," as she termed it.

"What makes 'oo cry?" she asked one day, glancing up at Miss Abbie when she happened to be in one of her low-spirited moods.

"Oh honey, I'm just lone and lorn."

"What's that? Who made you that?" she seemed to think someone was to blame for it.

"Nobody, that's what's the matter—there's nobody, nobody cares."

"Nobody," the child looked at her wonderingly, "why, there's somebody, they's me," and understanding through intuition, not reason, the child laid her little plump cheek upon Miss Abbie's withered neck, and the two sat there in each other's arms, in mute sympathy.

About this time they all took the measles; and the Barnes home was turned into a temporary hospital. First one, then another came down with it. It was then that Miss Abbie proved her usefulness. Her never ending patience and slow faithfulness came in very opportunely. It was quite four weeks before the children were back in school; and they had hardly gotten well established in their lessons when whooping-cough again assigned them to the house.

"Whatever is to become of us, I don't know," said Mrs. Barnes. "First it's the baby, then the measles and then the whooping-cough."

"But it might be worse, ma," observed Tildy, who never forgot her blessings.

"Yes, it might be worse, and it might be better, and the baby seems to have the colic the whole enduring time."

"Johnny is out playing in the snow," called out Miss Abbie, poking her head in at the sitting room door.

"And him a coughing his head off every night. Call him in here, Miss Abbie! I've just got to wear him out."

"Johnny Barnes, do you want to die with the whooping-cough?" asked his mother, as he came into the house a moment afterwards.

Johnny didn't say whether he'd like to go with that

disease or some other, but he kicked the snow off his shoes on the carpet, and had to sit in a corner back of the stove for half an hour, as an act of penance.

Willie, meantime, had busied himself making a train of cars out of the dining-room chairs. They were turned down on the floor, the legs and backs tied together, and Minnie perched on top as a passenger.

"Puff, Puff! Puff!" cried Willie, trying to pull the whole train across the floor, and then he had to stop and cough a while, Minnie joining in, and little Teddy, who had just woke up and toddled into the room, also began to cough—it was a dreadful chorus.

"Dear, dear, just listen to the children cough!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes. "They've all got to take some horehound syrup. I forgot to give it to 'em this morning."

She believed in simple, old fashioned remedies and had brewed some very bitter tea, thickening it with sugar, as soon as their malady developed.

"Miss Abbie, bring me that can of syrup off the kitchen shelf. Here Johnny, come out of that corner and drink this horehound, and be a good boy the rest of the day, or I'll have to wear you out."

Johnny did as he was told, making a very wry face at swallowing, but it took considerable coaxing and threatening to get the dose down the others, little Ted resisting with all his might.

Presently the chair cars were running again on schedule time, Johnny as engineer, Willie, conductor, and Minnie and Teddy, passengers.

Mrs. Barnes, who had taken the sleeping babe to her family bedroom and closed the door, heard very little of the noise until her attention was attracted by an

awful shriek from Teddy, who had fallen off the back car and nearly broken his nose.

"What's the matter? Who hurt him?" cried Mrs. Barnes, appearing on the scene at that moment.

"He ain't hurt much; he just rolled off the chair."

But Teddy strangled and coughed for about five minutes before his mother got him quieted. Meantime the cars began running again but with rather subdued puffing.

"Puff! Puff! Puff!" went Johnny.

"Choo! Choo! Choo!" went Willie. Then forgetting his caution, he gave a shrill whistle.

But that was his last one. His mother's hand came forcibly across his mouth.

"Stop that noise! You'll wake the baby. Untie those chairs and stand them up straight. I've a notion to whip every one of you. It's dreadful to have you bottled up in a house like this."

"You won't let us go out of doors," ventured Johnny.

"Don't talk back at me, Johnny Barnes; whatever I'm to do with you children I don't know. I'll just have to turn you over to your father."

But finally the whooping-cough became a thing of the past, the children returned to school, and the warm, bright days began to whisper of spring.

And then after all these strenuous times, Mrs. Barnes suddenly remembered that the baby had never been christened. Being so busy, so occupied with other things, they had hardly thought of giving it a name, always referring to it as "the baby."

All of her other children had been properly and carefully christened, the event being recognized by a dinner,

when all the available relatives assembled and celebrated the occasion.

Tildy was the only child who hadn't been named after a noted person, either historical or mythological. Matilda Ann was named after Mrs. Barnes' mother. John Wesley, in honor of the noted divine, William C. was for William the Conqueror, and Minerva represented the Goddess of Wisdom, while Teddy overstepped them all when he was christened Theodore Roosevelt.

Now came the question,—what should they name the baby?

For a week Mrs. Barnes poured over books, eagerly scanned the newspapers and racked her brains with Christian names till she could scarcely sleep, and even dreamed about it one night.

"Dorothy, Dora, Violet, Margaret, Mary, Rose, Pansy, Ruth, Ru-Ra-Ri—" shrieked Mrs. Barnes, beating the bed clothes.

"Wake up! wake up! You're dreaming." Mr. Barnes shook his wife, who awoke suddenly and sat upright in bed.

"Where's the baby? I've named her."

"What have you named her?"

"Dorothy, Dora, Violet—Ruth—oh, I—don't know—what it was."

"Of course you don't. You've been dreaming!"

And so the baby's name hung in the balance for several days, till one bright morning when Mrs. Barnes read a newspaper article about the charities and great kindness of Helen Gould.

"That's it—that's her name," said she, rising from her chair so suddenly that Helen Gould almost fell out of her lap.

"Miss Abbie! Oh Miss Abbie! I've named the baby!"

Miss Abbie came running in.

"Oh, have you? Bless its little soul—what's its name?"

"Helen Gould. She's one of the finest women in the world. I hope the baby will be just like her."

"And rich too. I hope she'll be rich too," broke in Miss Abbie, "and not poor—lone and lorn—like me."

"I hope she'll be good, whatever she is—oh, Miss Abbie, we'll have a christening dinner and invite in all her kin. We always do, you know, with all the children."

"When will you have it?"

"Tomorrow—no, day after tomorrow. We'll have to cook tomorrow and send out the invitations."

CHAPTER III.

THE CHRISTENING

The Barnes residence was not elegant nor spacious, but it was fairly comfortable.

There were two good living rooms and a sort of lean-to, containing a small bedroom and a kitchen. The yard was quite large, land being cheap in that locality. There was a garden spot and a cow lot. Several fruit trees and a grape arbor graced the back yard, while a real cedar tree and a lilac bush grew near the front gate.

Mr. Barnes had labored long and wrought mightily to accumulate all of this and provide for his growing family.

The morning of the christening dawned bright and balmy. Mrs. Barnes and Miss Abbie were astir at four o'clock, and with their united efforts succeeded in getting things in a very tangled condition by breakfast time.

"Is breakfast ready?" asked Mr. Barnes, looking dubiously at the table, as he came in from milking.

"Ready long ago, just keeping it warm on the stove."

Mrs. Barnes stooped down and opened the oven door. "Law me, Abbie, the biscuits are burnt up!"

"Biscuits burnt up!" echoed she, "and there ain't no lightbread."

"Whatever shall I do!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes, sinking down on a chair and breathing hard.

"There's oatmeal," suggested Miss Abbie, "and cold potatoes—maybe he could eat that with his meat."

"Anything, just so I can get to work on time," said Mr. Barnes, who had gone through similar experiences.

"Oh dear, dear—to think I let the bread burn up, and I will have to cook more for the children, and so much to do. Poor Andrew, I couldn't bear to give him such a breakfast if I didn't know he would have a good dinner. Andrew!" calling after him at the door, "do try and get home early. Remember they will all be here."

The confusion that reigned on the premises for the next few hours was indescribable.

"Tilly, you and Johnny go over to Mrs. Dale's and borrow some of her dining room chairs. Just hist 'em over the fence out there, and Miss Abbie'll take 'em. Hurry up, too. It's nearly school time."

Finally the three eldest children were started to school, the three youngest washed and dressed, the house was spick and span, the dinner well on its way—Mrs. Barnes began to breathe easily.

"It's about time some of 'em was here," she observed, looking at the clock. As if in answer to her words, Mrs. Barnes' sister and her two daughters appeared at the gate, while a few rods behind them came her husband's nephew and niece.

"How-de-do, Myranda and Mary and Alice. I thought it was about time you was coming, and here comes Jane and Philip. Give me your bonnet and hats. Better lay your gloves on the mantel out of the children's reach. Dear, dear, I'm so glad it's a pretty day."

She was talking to all at the same time and giving them a hearty welcome in her breezy, cheery way.

"And why didn't your mother come, Philip?"

"She and Uncle Joseph will be here before long."

"Uncle Joseph! you don't mean he's here!"

"Yes, he came last night."

"Well, well, I haven't seen him for ten years. Does he look pretty old?"

"Rather oldish. Been wandering around considerable."

"It's a pity he don't settle down at his age."

"Yes, he needs somebody to look after him, but he's so timid he can hardly speak to any one."

At this point the baby, who was crowing and laughing in her crib, was snatched up by her Aunt Myranda, while little Teddy stood with his finger in his mouth behind the bed, positively refusing to cultivate any of his relatives. Minnie was already on her Cousin Philip's knee, telling him about the baby's name.

Mrs. Barnes took advantage of this opportunity to escape to the kitchen and see how the dinner was coming on.

"Abbie, have you tried the hen? Do you think she's getting tender?"

"Yes ma'am, I've just stuck her with a fork, and she's nearly done."

"And the sweet potatoes, are they baking?"

"Just fine. Didn't you say we would have to borrow some of Mrs. Howard's soup plates?"

"That's so, and I do believe we'll have to have some more table spoons."

"Must I take a basket?"

"Yes, take the basket, and you'd better bring a few more sauce dishes and half a dozen napkins. Climb over the back fence. Don't let anybody see you."

Miss Abbie did as she was told. The back fence was high, but she got over with surprising alacrity—that was, going over with the empty basket. Coming back it was different; so after an ineffectual attempt to climb over with a basket full of dishes, she concluded to go nearer the front yard where the fence was not so high.

Her sunbonnet was well over her face, and probably she couldn't see good. Anyway, her foot slipped, her dress caught on a nail, and basket, dishes and all came clattering to the ground—and there she hung. She couldn't loosen her dress and she couldn't reach the ground. The broken dishes scared her and she began to cry, and say, "whatever shall I do"—when lo! a man stood before her—an oldish kind of a man who looked scared himself.

"Oh, sir, what shall I do?" cried Miss Abbie, making another frantic effort to free herself.

He didn't speak, but reaching over the fence where her dress was held by a nail, he freed her so suddenly and unexpectedly that she fell on the basket among the dishes, making an awful clatter and finishing up the wreckage.

By this time the attention of those in the house had been attracted and the whole party came out, beholding Miss Abbie among the ruins.

"Why, Abbie Dobbs, whatever is the matter with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes, viewing the scene in consternation.

"I got caught on the fence," explained Miss Abbie, wringing her hands, the tears running down her face.

"Well, well, don't cry about it," said the old man who had rescued her.

"But I'm so unlucky," wailed she, "everything I do is unlucky," and pulling her bonnet over her face, she ran into the kitchen, while the guests helped Mrs. Barnes pick up the broken china.

Only about half a dozen pieces were broken after all.

"Don't cry about it," said Mrs. Barnes, finding Miss Abbie in the little lean-to bedroom still bathed in tears.

"Oh, whatever is the matter with me? I'm so lone and lorn and unlucky," she wailed.

"Don't think about that now, come and help me with the dinner. Only a few sauce dishes were broken. I'll buy Mrs. Howard some more."

Swallowing her sobs, Miss Abbie returned to her neglected dinner, where happily nothing had gone amiss. Presently everything was in readiness, and a very sumptuous and plentiful repast was spread on the board. Boiled chicken and dumplings, roast pork and sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes creamed to a feathery flakiness, corn pudding, macaroni stewed with cheese, cranberry jelly, raspberry jam, with dessert of mince pie and chocolate cake.

The children, being in a hurry to get back to school, were allowed to eat at the first table with the grown-ups, and did ample justice to the meal. Their manners were fairly good, except that Johnny asked for two pieces of pie and was detected by his mother snatching a second piece of cake as he left the table.

It was a very long, loud and merry meal, and just at its close, little Helen Gould was held up in her father's arms, her name being officially announced and pronounced to the guests, and all drank a glass of lemonade in her honor, wishing her long life and happiness.

Miss Abbie and Tildy waited on the table till time for the dessert and then, as some of the dishes had to be washed, Mrs. Barnes went to the kitchen to assist.

"Who is that old man in there that helped me off the fence?" asked Miss Abbie.

"Why, didn't I tell you? It's Mr. Barnes' Uncle Joseph. He's been roaming around the world all his life. Good enough, but kind-a good for nothing, you know."

"Ain't he got no family?"

"Family, I'd think not. He's a bachelor, and scared to death of women."

Passing him his dessert a few moments later, Miss Abbie looked curiously at her ancient rescuer. His head was slightly bald, his hair iron gray, his forehead and nose very prominent, his expression kindly, but timid. His coat was frayed at the edges, his linen not strictly clean. He seemed shy, never speaking except when some one addressed him, just one of those floating pieces of neglected humanity, having no home, not needed by any-one, whose death would leave no gap in any life.

By four o'clock the guests began to disperse; by five they were all gone and the christening was over.

That night, when Helen Gould lay asleep on her mother's bed and Teddy was tucked away in his crib, little Minnie, robed in her nightdress, slipped off to Miss Abbie's lean-to bedroom and found that weary person sitting by the window, looking sad, as was her wont.

Minnie climbed up in her lap, smoothed her slim face and patted the wrinkles out with a loving hand. Tears unbidden stole from Miss Abbie's eyes.

"Is you lone and lorn today?"

"Yes, honey, lone and lorn and unlucky."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PICNIC

SWEET JUNE

Come, sweet June, and let me lay
My head upon thy flowry breast,
Pressing my face against
The flowers I love best.
Oh! thou art fair, and wondrous is thy power
To while away a drowsy summer hour!
Seductive is thy smile, and sweet the air
Laden with thy perfume everywhere.

I'll lay me down upon thy leafy lap,
And there, amid thy roses, take a nap—
The deep blue sky a canopy above,
The birds and bees crooning out their love.
Oh, let me dream of thee, sweet leafy June!
My heart and thine keyed up to perfect tune.
Wrapped in thy arms, dear, let me dream away
The matchless beauty of a summer day.

Summer had arrived. The lazy, leafy month of June was shedding its sunshine on the little town of Roseville.

It was an attractive, picturesque spot, located near the banks of a winding stream. Heavy timber grew near the water and huge old forest trees were scattered

round about as far as the edge of the rolling prairie land that lay a mile beyond the limits of the town.

Fish abounded in the little stream, and many a lazy man and truant schoolboy sat on its mossy banks and angled for the finny tribe. Who could blame them? Woods and weather, birds and bees, blue skies and limpid waters, wild roses and green ferns lured them forth.

"Ma, let's go to the woods tomorrow, all of us, and play like it was a picnic."

Johnny, who made the suggestion, was sitting on the back porch stemming gooseberries, likewise Willie, while Mrs. Barnes and Miss Abbie were just finishing up the week's washing, having arrived at the rinsing period.

"Why, I don't know. It is mighty pretty weather."

"There's the ironing to do," said Miss Abbie.

"That's so, and I haven't got anything baked. We ate up all the cake Sunday."

"Did Johnny say picnic?" asked Tildy, appearing upon the scene with the baby in her arms. "Oh, I wish we could go!"

"I wis we tould go," echoed Minnie.

"My eye, I wish we could go!" cried Willie, trying to shoot a gooseberry into Johnny's mouth.

"Well, well, if you all want to go so bad, maybe we can manage it," said Mrs. Barnes, as she wrung the last garment out of the water.

"We might iron a few things we need tonight," observed Miss Abbie.

"And bake a little bit this afternoon," added Mrs. Barnes.

"Whoop! Whoop!" cried Johnny.

"But how'll we go?" asked Tildy, the practical.

"There it is," and Mrs. Barnes set down the clothes basket she was carrying as the question confronted her.

"Let's walk, and wheel the baby in her buggy," said Willie.

"What'll we do with Teddy? And Minnie can't walk that far."

"Carry 'em," said Johnny.

"Carry those children—and all that lunch? We can't do it."

"Well, let's borrow Mrs. Baker's buggy," said Willie.

"No, it has only one seat, and she wouldn't like to loan it anyway," replied his mother.

"There's Mr. Scott's delivery wagon," suggested Johnny.

"But he uses it every day. That won't do."

"I don't see no way to go at all," said Miss Abbie disconsolately.

While Mrs. Barnes and Miss Abbie were hanging out the clothes, the children discussed the question of going over and over again, suggesting every vehicle the small town contained. There was no regular livery barn in the place, and had there been one, Mrs. Barnes would not have felt justified in hiring one for such an occasion.

As the afternoon wore on, the chances for a picnic the next day looked very slim.

"Well, I'll bake some pies and cookies anyway," observed Mrs. Barnes, "and maybe we can think out some way by morning."

The children slept poorly that night, their rest being disturbed by visions of green woods, picnic parties and horses and buggies. Willie was so wrought up over the affair that he talked out in his sleep several times.

"Whoa there! Whoa! Whoa! The horse is running away!"

"What horse?" cried Johnny, waking up. "Have you got a horse?"

"I was dreaming we had a horse and was going to the picnic," murmured Willie, sinking upon his pillow again.

"No such luck," moaned Johnny.

The morning dawned clear and beautiful, a rosy dawn in a blue sky, a typical June morning.

"It's so lovely," cried Tildy, standing in the doorway after breakfast, "and to think we can't get a horse or wagon or anything. I'd be willing to haul the children in a wheelbarrow myself, if I could."

"I've got it!" cried Johnny, throwing up his hat and leaping over the porch railing like a deer.

"Got what, Johnny Barnes? You act like you had something dreadful," said his sister.

"I know it'll do, and it's all we can do," he explained, as if fearing opposition.

"What'll do? What do you mean?"

"Mr. Howard's paper cart. He ain't using it now, and it'll hold Minnie and Teddy and the baby, and we'll pull it, turn about."

"Will that do, ma?" asked Tildy, her mother having come to the door.

"It'll be a mighty poor do, but I reckon it's all we can do," she replied dubiously.

So it transpired that Johnny got the cart, a two-wheeled vehicle that Mr. Howard used to carry about his wall paper and other utensils from house to house. It gave ample accommodation for the three little ones and the luncheon, and it was a very happy party that

started to the woods that morning. Willie and Johnny pulled the cart, as they went through the town, but the others took their turns when they came to the country road.

A mile and a half from home they came to an idyllic spot, a gentle, grassy slope, close to the river bank, where giant oaks spread their foliage overhead and shells and mossy rocks were scattered along the shores.

"We'll stop here," said Mrs. Barnes. "I don't believe there's no prettier spot on earth."

So the cart was halted, a quilt was spread upon the ground, on which the baby was placed, together with a lot of playthings which Tildy had thoughtfully brought along.

Ted and Minnie were soon busy hunting for pretty shells and rocks, while Johnny and Willie, producing their fishing tackle, crawled out on an old log that extended far into the river and dropped their hooks into the limpid water.

"I'll gather some dry sticks to cook dinner with," said Tildy. "Are you sure you brought the frying pan, ma?"

"Yes, and I do hope the eggs ain't broke. Abbie, hand me that basket."

All things were well, and luckily, just before dinner, the boys landed three crappies which Mrs. Barnes fried to a finish. The fish and eggs together with the cold edibles, made a sumptuous repast. They were just clearing away the dinner, when Miss Abbie exclaimed, "Who's that!"

A tall, shambling figure was seen climbing up the river bank not far away. An old straw hat was well down on his face, and a fishing rod in his hand.

"Law me, if it ain't Uncle Joe!"

The exclamation attracted his attention. He looked toward them and paused, as if uncertain whether or not to advance.

"Come on, Uncle Joe, and have some dinner. We're just clearing it away."

Slowly he came toward them. He was coatless, and only one gallus supported his faded trousers.

"Having a picnic?" he asked, taking a dingy bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his face.

"Yes, the children would have me come. They caught some fish too, but we et 'em all up."

"I haven't caught a one this morning," he said. "I'm always unlucky."

Miss Abbie looked up quickly as he said this, a light of sympathy in her face, but she only said, "Just like me."

Uncle Joe looked at her curiously as he began to eat, doing full justice to all the remaining food, and Mrs. Barnes inwardly grieved that there wouldn't be a morsel left, in case the children wanted a piece before they reached home.

"Where'd the boys catch the fish?" asked Uncle Joe, after he had finished his dinner.

"Right out there on that log," answered Johnny, "and I bet there's lots more."

"It does look like a good place. I expect there's a deep pool under there."

Presently Uncle Joe and the two boys were sitting in a row on the trunk of the old tree silently watching for nibbles. Teddy and the baby went to sleep, and Tildy sat on the bank grieving because she had no fishing tackle.

"I'll give you my hook," said Uncle Joe, after fishing for an hour without catching anything. "Maybe you'll be luckier than me."

Tildy took his place on the log and, to her great delight, soon landed a fine crappie. In her excitement she threw her rod in the air whirling the fish around their heads till it was some time before Uncle Joe could get it off the hook.

"Oh, oh! it squirms so. I wouldn't touch it for anything!" cried Tildy.

All this noise woke Teddy, but Miss Abbie managed to soothe him to sleep again in her arms. Quiet had hardly been restored when Willie yelled out, "I've got one!" But even as he yelled, he fell and went splash into the water, in the deepest part of the pool.

"Oh, oh! Uncle Joe, save him!" cried his mother, rushing frantically to the bank. But even as she spoke, Uncle Joe leaped into the water with the agility of a young man, and by the time Willie had got to the surface for the first time, he had him by the shirt collar, and partly waded, half swam with him to the shore.

A sorry looking pair they were, but Mrs. Barnes, in her gratitude and excitement, actually hugged them both, and Miss Abbie, who had dropped Ted on the ground, raised her arms for a moment as though she was going to hug them too, then, checking herself, she said, "A brave deed, Mr. Joe," at which he held up his dripping head for a moment and looked quite manly.

After this there was nothing to do but go home. The day being warm, Willie and his rescuer were not so uncomfortable in their wet clothes, but their appearance was anything but prepossessing. Uncle Joe's clinging clothes brought out the bones and angles in his long, lank

figure, and he insisted on pulling the cart, that is, by one shaft, the children taking turn about with the other. Once Johnny dropped his shaft to run after a squirrel, and Miss Abbie took it up, walking quite a distance with Mr. Joe, neither speaking a word. Mrs. Barnes and Tildy walked close behind the vehicle, to keep Teddy from climbing out, as that youngster wanted to walk and kick his feet in the dusty road. Twice they had taken him out, and he would walk nowhere except in the middle of the road where the dust was deep.

Just before they reached the town Uncle Joe separated himself from the party, and took a circuitous route home, the two boys hitching themselves to the cart.

It was a tired, hungry, but happy little party that halted at the Barnes' front gate, where they proceeded to unload their baggage, which consisted of baskets, buckets, frying pans, Minnie, Teddy, and Helen Gould, who had slept all the way home.

The cart was returned to Mr. Howard's stable yard and the picnic was over, a perfect success in every way, even including the ducking.

CHAPTER V.

THE RECEPTION

Mrs Nash had sent out cards for a reception—real printed cards in stamped envelopes, sent through the mail. Such a thing had never been done in Roseville before. Of course there had been parties, but the invitations were delivered verbally, or at most written by hand on small note paper. This was to be a grand affair, two weeks' notice having been given so everybody would have time to get ready.

Mrs. Barnes, of course, had received an invitation and was in a great state of anxiety and excitement. On account of the increasing frequency of her family, she had given very little time or money to dress for several years past. Now the appalling question arose before her—what should she wear?

That question comes to every woman some time in her life, to some daily. It comes to the rich and poor alike, and is about as difficult for one to answer as the other. The rich woman can wear what she pleases, but don't know what pleases her; the poor woman must wear what she can get, whether it pleases her or not.

"I don't see how I can afford to buy the goods and hire my dress made too, and I don't see how I can make it myself so it'll look fit to wear. I ain't made anything but children's clothes for so long," sighed Mrs. Barnes.

"Do you intend to get a silk dress?" asked Miss Abbie, soothingly.

"Yes, I thought it had better be silk. I never had but one silk dress—my wedding dress, and I'd like to have another. It's a dark blue piece I was looking at."

"If you'll get a good, new pattern, maybe I could help you fit it."

"Maybe you could. I believe I'll go uptown this morning and buy the piece and we'll try to make out somehow."

Mrs. Barnes was not the only woman who was studying the subject of dress. All the seamstresses in town were busy, and many were making their own clothes.

But if all the town was stirred up over the reception, what must have been the state of Mrs. Nash's mind—the lady who was to give it? She was determined it should be a great success, that no reasonable amount of money or effort should be spared to make it one of the greatest events that had ever taken place in Roseville. True, her house was not large. There were only four rooms downstairs and two above, the latter being approached by a very narrow and steep stairway.

Some of her carpets and furniture were not as fresh as she would like to have had them, but everything looked better by lamplight than by daylight—so she had determined to close up the house, pull down the blinds and light the lamps, even if it should be a hot summer afternoon.

Of course the people would bring their fans and she would serve ice cream to cool them off.

She was very much disturbed about the music. She must have an orchestra, and there wasn't a soul in Roseville who could play any stringed instrument, except old Uncle Joe Barnes, who, back in his youth, had played

the fiddle for all the country dances, in spite of his extreme timidity. Finally, after much inquiry, she heard of two men who played the guitar and mandolin. They lived in the next town, but she resolved to hire them at any cost.

Another cause of grave consideration was the question of gloves. Should she wear them or not at the great hand-shaking? She had always understood that hand-shaking was the principal part of a reception. For comfort she much preferred leaving her gloves off, but for style she believed she ought to wear them. They would have to reach to her elbows, as her dress was made with low neck and short sleeves.

There would be no set programme. Hand-shaking, refreshments and an orchestra were all she had ever heard of as constituting a reception, and she was going to stay by the rule.

The momentus day arrived, a hot, sultry day in July. Mrs. Barnes was just putting the finishing touches on her new blue silk, and regretting that she had not selected a thin lawn for such a warm day, when a little boy arrived hurriedly at the back door:

"Mrs. Nash says for Miss Abbie to come right over there! The girl she got to help her is sick, and the ice cream ain't made, and she's got to have somebody—and—"

Miss Abbie looked at Mrs. Barnes. "Must I go? You're so busy."

"Yes, you'd better. Mrs. Nash needs you more than I do, with all them folks coming. Go right along—Tildy'll take care of the children."

And so it happened that Miss Abbie attended the reception. Shortly after she had gone, Uncle Joe Barnes

came sauntering by and stopped for a little chat and play with the children. They thought a great deal of him and looked forward to his coming, for though he said little to them, he seldom forgot to bring them some little gift, a bit of candy or an orange. Sometimes he whittled out tops and whistles, or made them a kite. On this occasion he brought Minnie a pasteboard doll that he had cut out himself.

"It's a powerful hot day," he said, seating himself on the shady porch.

"Yes, such a hot day for the reception. And they say Mrs. Nash is going to have the doors and windows closed, and the lamps burning. I'm afraid we can't stand it."

At this point the little boy who had come after Miss Abbie, appeared again in the same breathless state.

"Is Mr. Joe here—Mr. Joe Barnes—oh yes," seeing him on the porch.

"She say—Mrs. Nash says that Mr. Joe is to bring his fiddle and come down to her house this afternoon and play, and Miss Allen will play on the organ with him."

"What's the matter? I thought she was going to have some men from Knoxburg," interrupted Mrs. Barnes.

"She says they can't come, and she's got to have some kind of music, and she'll pay him well."

"Why, I-I ain't been playing much lately, and I'm afraid I couldn't."

"Yes you can, Uncle Joe. I heard you play beautiful the other evening over to Sarah's. Besides, Mrs. Nash must have somebody, and you're the only one there is."

I'll dress you up all right. I wonder if you could wear Andrew's new coat?"

"I-I'm afraid it 'ud be too short."

Mrs. Barnes did not wait for him to say more but brought out the coat and tried it on him. It was short; the sleeves struck him far above the wrists and the back crawled up on his shoulders. She pulled the sleeves down with all her might and almost swung her full weight on the back to get it below the waist, but it was no use.

"It won't do, Uncle Joe, but if you'll bring over your best clothes, I'll brush 'em up for you, and put on Andrew's collar and necktie."

"Why, I can wear Philip's coat. He's tall like me, and sister Sarah'll brush me up. You've got enough to do."

And so it transpired that Uncle Joe also attended the reception.

The thermometer registered 95 in the shade at two o'clock when Mrs. Barnes, wearing her blue silk and new straw hat, carrying a parasol over her head, crossed the road going toward her neighbor's house. The closed door and lowered window shades would have indicated to a stranger that no one was at home—but in this case it indicated a reception—a very warm reception, indeed.

Mrs. Barnes, contrary to her usual custom of opening the door and entering the house unannounced, paused, lowered her parasol, adjusted her hat, and knocked. The door was immediately opened, and Mrs. Nash, whom she was accustomed to meet every day in dressing sacque or wrapper, stood before her like a statue, in low-cut dress, short sleeves and elbow gloves.

Her hair was done up high on her head, an elaborate bow crowning the top.

"How do you do, Mrs. Barnes. So glad to see you. Just pass upstairs."

She gave her the tips of her gloved fingers, and Mrs. Barnes, uttering an awed monosyllable, climbed up the narrow stairway.

Mrs. Baker and two or three other ladies were there fanning and mopping their faces with powdered handkerchiefs.

"Awfully hot, I'm just sweltering, and the powder won't stay on," said one.

"My frizzes are all out. I curled them good before I came, but they are straight and wet as a dishrag now."

"Shall we go down? I wonder if many have come?"

As they passed down they met two ladies coming up and had to squeeze against the wall to let them by.

Presently the house was full. Uncle Joe had arrived, also the maiden lady who was to accompany him on the wheezy organ. Uncle Joe's repertoire of musical numbers was neither large, late, nor classical, consisting chiefly of "The Devil's Dream," "The Irish Washerwoman," "The Arkansas Traveller," and the like; but he played them all over and over again as hard as he could, and had at least one admiring listener. Miss Abbie's heart was strangely moved as she heard the stirring notes of the violin, albeit she was busy dishing out the ice cream and cutting cake. And, while alone in the kitchen, the two waiters having taken some trays to the parlors, she was almost taken off her feet by the sudden appearance of Uncle Joe.

"Had to come out to get a breath of fresh air and some water," he explained, putting his hand up to his

collar, which was lying like a wet rag around his neck.

"Here's a glass right now—and—and how are they getting on in there?"

"Mighty slow and hot, and I've nearly played my arm off."

"Oh, it's beautiful, Mr. Joe. I didn't know you could play so well."

Just then the waiters returned, and the weary violinist made his way back to the reception rooms.

The assembled guests knew each other quite well, were accustomed to meeting almost daily in their everyday clothes at their everyday tasks, and under ordinary circumstances, would have made merry and enjoyed themselves, but now the knowledge that they were at a reception—not a common party—the feel of their new clothes, and the overpowering loftiness and dignity of Mrs. Nash, cast a cloud over their spirits and tied their tongues, so they sat and looked at each other and wished they could go home.

Finally some one asked the organist, a long, lean maiden with bare skeleton shoulders, to sing "Molly Darling," which she did in a squeaky voice, accompanied by the squeaky organ and Uncle Joe's scratching fiddle.

Just as the last notes of the song died away, a painful silence followed, which was broken by a very unlooked-for occurrence. A clatter was heard outside, the front door was thrown open and a small boy barefooted, bareheaded, came running into the room.

"Why, Willie Barnes, whatever made you—"

But his mother's mortified expression was cut short.

"Ma, oh ma! Johnny's killed! He fell off the woodshed and can't talk."

"Oh doctor," cried Mrs. Barnes, turning to Dr.

Mather, who sat near her, "come with me. What in the world did he fall off the woodshed for? Whatever am I to do with the children!"

Mrs. Barnes and the doctor hurried away; Uncle Joe followed them, and a general stampede occurred—the guests in all their finery running across the street to the Barnes' place, Mrs. Nash following in the rear, vainly trying to hold up her ruffled train.

When they arrived, Johnny was lying with his head in Tildy's lap, gasping for breath, while little Minnie was standing near, crying. The doctor examined the boy, bathed his face with water, raised him to a sitting posture, and Johnny opened his eyes and began to breathe naturally.

"Just knocked the breath out of him," said the doctor. "Pretty bad jar—be all right in a little while."

But the reception was broken up. The guests went straggling back by twos and threes, got their hats and went home. Mrs. Nash so far forgot herself and her dignity, as to leave the door open when she shook hands with them at parting, and they so far departed from the truth as to tell her they had enjoyed themselves.

They then rushed home with all speed to get off their new clothes, sit in the cool shade, and criticise their hostess.

Mrs. Nash went back to her deserted parlor, sat down on the sofa, clasped her gloved hands, and murmured to herself, "Those awful Barnes children."

CHAPTER VI.

THE CIRCUS

The summer days wore on. Vacation was drawing to a close. The school children of Roseville dreaded to think of the second week in September, when bells and books would be calling them from their outdoor sports. Not so the parents. Mothers and fathers, long spent with idle, noisy children, longed for the sound of the school-bell and often wished that the term would last twelve months in the year.

The children had passed a glad, happy summer in this lovely little western town, surrounded by woods and streams and so convenient for picnics and fishing parties. The boys had put in most of their idle time at ball games and fishing, the girls playing hop-scotch and trundling about the family babies, Roseville being noted for its infant population.

As a grand climax (a sort of last appearance) of all the summer sport, it was decided by the majority of the kids to have a show, a regular circus, to be held on the common in front of the Barnes residence.

Johnny Barnes and Bob Dale got up the program, an elaborate affair that would include many actors and some animals, for what would a circus be unless it had animals, a real menagerie.

"Where'll we get the animals?" asked Bob Dale, talking the matter over.

"I can bring our cow," said Johnny. She'll lead anywhere, and Willie can ride her."

"And we can get Thompson's goat and Sam Stoll will bring his white rabbits in a cage, to look like caged animals," observed Bob, brightening up.

"But you got to do something, got to tumble, to turn summersets, hang from the trapeze and walk ropes. Who'll do that?" quiered Johnny.

"Why all of us kids can do stunts, if we'll practice a few days," replied Bob, encouragingly.

And so the melee began. For full two weeks, the common in front of the house was alive with shrieking howling, leaping children. By much hard work and some help from the parents, they managed to erect a fairly good trapeze and to stretch a tight rope from one post to another. To procure a tent was impossible, so it had to be an open-air circus.

On the trapeze and tight rope some boy was continually performing, so it was no uncommon thing for Mrs. Barnes to be called several times a day to wipe off the gore and bind up the limbs of some bruised and bleeding boy. Still the fun went on. Willie Barnes rode the cow from morning till night, practicing all manner of stunts, till that gentle bovine had almost ceased to give milk and wore a bewildered look in her eyes, not knowing why she had been turned from a family cow into a circus horse.

A chariot race was on the program. The goat was to be hitched to Teddy Barnes' little red wagon. Besides this, Bob Dale was training his dog, Watch, to do tricks, to stand up on his hind legs, to shake hands and leap over chairs.

Such contortions as the boys went through were

terrible to behold, and when Sam Stoll painted his face and acted the wild man from Borneo, it was simply immense.

"But we ain't got no horse," said Johnny Barnes disconsolately, one day. "A cow's well enough, but a real circus ought to have a real horse." So Mr. Nash very kindly loaned them his old, blind mare, who marched solemnly behind the cow when they practiced the Grand Entry. Johnny Barnes had gotten so that he performed day and night. He couldn't stand on the porch a minute, talking to his mother, without turning a handspring off the front steps.

"Say, ma," he said one day, walking into the kitchen on his hands and turning a summersault over the stove, "we want a wild animal. Where'll we get a wild animal?"

"You're the wildest animal that I know of," said his mother, as she deposited Helen Gould on her highchair, "and I'll tell you now, Johnny Barnes, if this circus business isn't stopped, I am going to have your Pa whip you. I like to see children have fun, but you've passed the limit. When I came from town yesterday, I couldn't find the baby. Willie had taken her out on that big box for a dwarf lady thirty-two years old and twenty-two inches high."

Just then there was an unearthly scream from the street, and a boy came rushing in breathlessly, to say that Bod Dale had fallen off the tight rope, and Mrs. Barnes, forgetting her exasperation, was soon helping the suffering boy to his feet, but he couldn't stand, so was taken home when it was found that a bone was broken.

The next day when Willie Barnes was doing some extra practicing on the cow, standing on one foot, the

other one high in the air, he forgot to guide old Cherry, and she walked right under the tight rope and knocked him off so that he fell on the little red wagon which was directly beneath him, hitched to the goat. Teddy had just climbed into the wagon and the frightened goat started off down the road at a fearful pace. Had it not been that Mr. Barnes was just coming home to dinner and stopped the runaway, the child might have fared badly.

This was the last straw that broke the camel's back, the last act of the circus. Mr. Barnes took the screaming Teddy in his arms, called Willie, who was wiping the dust out of his mouth, and entering the front gate just as Johnny was standing on his head, he grasped that surprised lad by the seat of his pants, and marched them all into the house.

"This circus business has got to be stopped!" he thundered, "I'm not going to put up with it another day. Thank heaven school begins next week!"

He immediately went into the back yard, where he procured an axe, and walking over to the circus ground, proceeded to cut down the posts that held the trapeze and tight ropes, unhitched Teddy's wagon from the hungry goat and led the old cow back into the stable lot.

"I like to see children have a good time, but blamed if I can stand everything," observed Pa Barnes, as he seated himself at the table.

"I'm mighty glad you done it," sighed Mrs. Barnes, "I've been nearly crazy for two weeks. Johnny's been standing on his head the whole endurin' time and Willie a setting on the cow."

"If I catch them at any more of their tricks, I'll

thrash 'em," said their father, looking severely at the two boys on the opposite side of the table.

"The cow likes for me to ride her," faltered Willie, tears of disappointment in his eyes.

"Likes it! she's stopped giving milk all right, and looks that addled, I'm afraid she's a losing her mind," replied his mother.

"Johnny had no business starting the circus, observed Mr. Barnes.

"He's always up to something," responded his mother, "I wish I could give him a pill or a capsule that would keep him out of mischief."

"Hickory tea is the best medicine I know of, and I'm a going to give 'em a good dose if I hear any more of this circus."

"I wish we could get along without whipping them," sighed the little mother, "that woman at the mother's meeting said you ought not to use the rod, but raise 'em with love and kindness."

"That's very well for mild children like Tildy and Minnie, but these boys need hickory tea and strap oil to keep their spirits down. They thrive on it," replied Pa Barnes, decisively.

Next Monday morning the welcome and dreaded school bell rang out on the cool, sweet air, and the wild children of Roseville meekly took their places in their respective classes, no worse for the summer vacation or the circus, ready to train for good and useful men and women.

CHAPTER VII.

MINNIE

"A little child shall lead them."

A cloud hung over the Barnes home. At first it was no bigger than a man's hand, just a little spot on the horizon, but now it had assumed the proportions of a storm-cloud and overshadowed the whole family.

It was diphtheria—that dreaded disease among children. A few raw, rainy days in early October, coming right after hot days in September, a little exposure and neglect, and the germ develops, stealing on little children like a thief in the night.

Willie first began with a common cold, as his mother thought, but after she had administered horehound tea, hive syrup, alum and honey and other household remedies with no effect whatever, she called in the doctor, who pronounced the case diphteria.

Of course the house was quarantined, and every one who dwelt therein, including Miss Abbie and Mr. Barnes, who could ill afford to be idle, with his accumulating family and soaring doctor's bills.

When a contagious disease develops in a small town, panic seizes the whole community. People will not pass on the stricken street if possible to avoid it, while necessary edibles and supplies are delivered at the front gate with fear and trembling. It is not because people of rural districts are cold hearted or unsympathetic, but because they are so unaccustomed to such

things that they become terrified. In cities we pass placarded houses every day and think nothing about it.

Had it not been for Uncle Joe, the Barnes family might have suffered for attention, but he made himself errand boy, groceryman, and mail carrier. He came as far as the kitchen door, where Miss Abbie received and delivered goods, and gave orders for what they needed.

Again Miss Abbie proved her worth and devotion. Slow but faithful she gave her labor and her love unstinted, and more than repaid them for all they had done for her. They seemed to have become her own; their troubles were her troubles; the welfare of the family hung on her heart and occupied her thoughts. She took the mother's and father's place at the bedside when they were weary or otherwise engaged, and ministered to the children with almost as much anxiety as did the parents.

Johnny and Teddy were the next to follow Willie, even before the prescribed nine days had elapsed, but fortunately, Willie was convalescing as they came down, and though their cases were more violent than his, they were much better in a few days.

After about three weeks of almost unmitigated care and watching, the three children were out of danger and the others showed no signs of taking it.

"It's the first night I've felt easy in my mind since Willie took sick," said Mrs. Barnes, who was rocking the baby to sleep while her husband read the paper.

On the other side of the stove, sat Tildy with the baby in her arms, so little Minnie crept up to Miss Abbie and laid her curly head on her lap.

"I'm so tired," she said.

"Tired, of course you're tired. You're sleepy. Get up in my lap."

Little Minnie laid her head on Miss Abbie's breast and began to pass her hand over the familiar wrinkles, running her fingers on down her neck in a caressing manner.

"Does you feel lone and lorn now?" she asked, patting out the largest wrinkle on her cheek.

"Not so lone now. I ain't got time to feel lone when you all need me so much. See, I've got you, and your ma and Tildy have the baby and Teddy."

"You've got me, ain't you?"

"Yes, honey, I've got you, and your face seems mighty hot."

"And I hurt right here," said the child, putting her hand to her throat.

"What—" Miss Abbie stopped rocking, then said in a quiet tone, "Mrs. Barnes, Minnie says her throat hurts her."

"Don't say that, Abbie! I don't believe I could stand that."

"Stand what?" asked Minnie.

"Nothing, honey, nothing, only you had better let me give you something to gargle in your throat."

And that was the beginning of Minnie's sickness.

The next morning, Uncle Joe, as usual, came to the kitchen door to take his orders for the day.

"Quarantine'll soon be off," he remarked, as he came toward Miss Abbie with a smile.

"No, oh no, Minnie's took now!"

"Minnie—not Minnie?" he cried.

"Yes the sweetest child of all."

"You're right; she's the—the sweetest of them all."

Uncle Joe had removed his hat when he first spoke, and now he kept it reverently in his hand, his gaze wan-

dering far away. Moisture was in his eyes and he blew his nose vigorously.

"It seems like I can't bear to see her took," remarked Miss Abbie.

"Nor me. I thought they were all over with it. I'd go in and see her, but people wouldn't let me come out again."

"No they wouldn't, and we've got to have things."

And then Miss Abbie told him what they needed to have that day.

With slow and plodding footsteps Uncle Joe wended his way toward the town, a look of melancholy and meditation on his face. He went to his nephew's, Philip's grocery store, where he stayed most of the time, helping when business was rushing, which was very seldom, except on Saturdays.

"How's the folks?" asked Philip.

"Bad," Uncle Joe shook his head. "Minnie's took now."

"Minnie—that pretty little thing. Well, I hope she'll come through as well as the others. It's too bad —did you say you wanted a dozen eggs, little girl?" And Philip was soon busy with his customers, while Uncle Joe selected the things he had been sent for, and packing them in a basket, was soon on his way back to the Barnes' home.

As he neared the Nash house, that lady opened the door and came out on the porch with a broom in her hand. No longer did she wear a low-necked dress and elbow gloves, as at the reception; in their stead was a blue calico wrapper and house mittens.

"Mr. Barnes, oh Mr. Barnes!—don't come any closer. I just want to inquire about the Barnes children."

"They're all doing well but Minnie. She got sick yesterday."

"That's too bad. Did you know that Carrie Baker was down with it—and they closed the school yesterday?"

"No, I didn't know that. I guess it's spreading."

"Tell Mrs. Barnes I'm real sorry for her—but they'll all get well. You can't kill the Barnes children."

"I hope not, ma'am," replied Uncle Joe with some spirit. "They're fine children, every one of them."

Mrs. Howard seemed to be the only neighbor who was not afraid of them, often calling Miss Abbie to the fence to give her a dish of some dainty she had prepared for the invalids.

And so the hours and days passed and Minnie grew worse in spite of all they could do, till one bright, sunshiny day, when she seemed to be a great deal better—the doctor having tried a new remedy.

"Her throat is clearing up. I really believe she has passed the crisis," said the doctor when he took his leave that evening.

So Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, much relieved in their minds, retired about ten o'clock, leaving Abbie to watch by the sick child.

"I'll declare I feel like if I once get to sleep I can't wake up," said Mrs. Barnes, as she laid her head on the pillow that night.

Mr. Barnes just groaned for reply. He had been housed up at home ever since the establishment of the quarantine, and anxiety and enforced idleness had brought his spirits to a low ebb.

Night wore on. Minnie slept fitfully till about two o'clock, then she seemed restless, her breathing became

more labored and Miss Abbie propped her up on some pillows.

"Where's ma?" she whispered.

"She's asleep—she's tired tonight, honey."

"Is you tired?"

"No, I'm not tired."

"I am—so tired—right here." She put her hand to her throat.

"I know it hurts you, but the doctor says you're better. Here, swallow a little of this."

The child made an effort to obey, but struggled and choked, saying, "I can't, it's bad."

"Well, you got a little down anyway. Now try to sleep."

She dozed off for a few minutes, and Miss Abbie's sleepy head nodded down close to the pillow on which the child was lying.

Presently she was awakened by feeling Minnie's hand slipping over her face, across the wrinkles and down her neck in the same old way she was wont to do.

"Is you lone and lorn now?" came a whisper.

"No, honey, not now. I've got you."

"Got me—ain't you?" The thought seemed to please her.

"Yes, dear, and if you'll get well, I'll try never to be lone and lorn any more."

"Never lone any—oh, hold me up!"

The child was gasping, her eyes strained, her hands clinched. Miss Abbie raised her in her arms.

"Mrs. Barnes! Mrs. Barnes! Come quick!"

By the time Mrs. Barnes reached the bedside, Minnie's form had become stiff and rigid, in a sort of spasm.

"Give her to me! Get some water! Bathe her face—she can't breathe!" said the agitated mother.

They laid her on the bed and worked with her for a long time; finally her limbs relaxed and her breathing became apparent. Mr. Barnes had gone for the doctor. Day was just breaking as they came in. The physician looked at his little patient—the white, unconscious face, the drawn lips. He felt the pulse and avoided the eyes of the parents.

"Is there any hope, doctor?" asked the father.

"I'm afraid not. Symptoms were all favorable yesterday—but this is a treacherous disease."

The children were not yet up, and it was a sad little group that stood around the bed. About this time a gentle knock was heard at the kitchen door, and Miss Abbie went to open it.

There stood Uncle Joe, come to take his orders for the day. When he saw Miss Abbie's tear-stained face, he guessed the truth.

"Is she—she worse?" he asked almost in a whisper.

"She's almost gone!" At this Miss Abbie's grief broke out afresh, and she hid her face in her apron.

"I'm coming in," said Uncle Joe, and he followed her into the sick room. Mrs. Barnes was kneeling by the bed, supporting Minnie's head on her arm. The child's eyes were half closed, her form still. The doctor put his hand over her face and said, "It is all over."

Mr. Barnes led his weeping wife from the bedside, and Miss Abbie, in her abandonment of grief, laid her head, for an instant, on Uncle Joe's shoulder, while he supported her form with his arm.

At this moment Tildy, hearing the commotion, poked

her face in from the bedroom door, saying, "What's the matter? How's Minnie?"

"Minnie is with the angels," answered the doctor.

This was the first deep sorrow that had fallen upon the Barnes family. Though poor and struggling, they had always managed to enjoy life a little as they went along and so far had taken no personal interest in the little graveyard over the hill, where all of the oldest population of Roseville now slept.

But after this they always made a Sunday excursion to the spot, the children picking wild flowers on the way to adorn the little grave. Once they could find nothing but dandelions which they wove into a chain and laid around the wooden headstone, and Willie was detected by his mother slipping a small piece of candy from his pocket and sticking it under a clod, in his loving childishness, wishing still to divide with the little sister who lay there.

Miss Abbie always wept and murmured, "She was all I had," while her hand involuntarily wandered to the wrinkles in her face that Minnie had always pressed and patted out. The Barnes family was prostrated with grief. They divided their time between the little cemetery and home. They talked about little Minnie in Heaven. They had lost a child, but had gained an angel.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT CHRISTMAS TIME

Little Helen was one year old and Theodore Roosevelt nearly three. Helen was just beginning to toddle, to walk from chair to chair, and balance herself by the wall. She fell down dozens of times a day, her little feet tripping at the least obstacle, and the step down from the living room to the kitchen was a source of constant delight to her. She would climb up, pulling herself by the door-facing, then turning around, sit down and slide over. This was great fun. Sometimes when she fell down, Teddy would try to lift her up, and as he was very short and fat, it was a hard tug and a great triumph when he managed to raise her.

She was beginning to speak a few words, among others she would say "pig-a-wig," when she wanted Tildy to play "Pig" with her toes. It was a great pleasure to her when Tildy would begin: "This little pig says I go get corn; this little pig says, where'll you get it; this little pig says, in Mossie's barn; this little pig says, I'll go tell; and this little pig says, quee! quee! quee! I can't get over the doorsill."

At the quee, quee, quee, Tildy always squeezed and kissed her little toes, which brought forth a great laugh.

Teddy was still young enough to appreciate the "pig" story himself, and he would often poke his little toes up and say, "Mine, too, Tildy, do mine too." He was a very noisy child, really loved to make a clatter.

He pounded on tin pans, beat the stoves, and often took the funnel of the oil can for a horn, blowing it with all his might. However, he was good-natured and affectionate, and had one redeeming quality—he would not run off.

For some unaccountable reason, in spite of her grief and heartache over little Minnie's death, Miss Abbie was looking younger and fresher than she had for many years. She had even begun to crimp her hair a little in front, and always wore a fresh collar pinned with a really fine old cameo pin that had been her mother's, which she had hitherto kept sacredly laid away. She often took the children to church and Sunday school, for which occasions Mrs. Barnes had bought and made for her a very nice dress.

"I can't do too much for Abbie," she would say, "when she has done so much for me. I don't feel as though I could ever get along without her."

Christmas was only about two weeks off, and all the children were trying to be "good as they could be," anticipating the presents they might receive. Willie and Johnny each hoped for a new pair of skates, and possibly a sled. Ted and the baby were too little to expect much of anything, but the other children were saving their pennies and nickels to buy them toys—and poor Tildy was nursing a wish that she dared not utter. Her childish heart craved a new set of furs, a boa and a muff, like Carrie Baker had, but she felt that her father had recently been at so much expense that he was not able to afford them, so she told no one of her desire except Miss Abbie, who, like Tildy, hated to mention the matter to Mrs. Barnes, knowing that she would feel bad to deny the child who so richly deserved such a gift.

But the more Miss Abbie pondered it in her mind, the more she worried about it.

Poor little Tildy ought to have her heart's desire. How she wished she had money to buy it. There wasn't a better child in all the town than Tildy. She had earned the furs over and over again, but the fact that she had earned them and deserved them did not make her father able to buy them.

So Miss Abbie pondered on the subject till one day when Uncle Joe was there, and Mrs. Barnes happened to be at a neighbor's house, she confided to him Tildy's wish, and expressed her own great desire to gratify it.

"I'll buy it," said Mr. Joe, "and you can go up and choose it, and never tell who done it."

"Oh, Mr. Joe, if you only could afford it!"

"I can, and will. I'll give you the money right now. How much is it?"

"I'm afraid it's too much. Carrie Baker's cost seven dollars."

He drew an old, greasy purse from his pocket, counted out the money, and gave it to her, and three dollars besides, "to buy yourself a present," said he.

"Oh, I can't!" said Miss Abbie, "ten dollars is too much for me."

"Well, you'll want to buy presents for the children."

And so Miss Abbie was very happy in the knowledge that she could make some presents, much happier than if she had expected a present herself.

Uncle Joe lived with his sister Sarah and her son Philip, who kept a little grocery store, and it had been lately noised abroad that Philip was going to get married. At least a neat little cottage of three rooms and

ample yard had been bought, and was being gradually furnished and fitted up for somebody to live in.

Philip had been paying attention to a very nice girl for two years, and it was supposed that the wedding would take place about Christmas.

Uncle Joe made himself very useful about the new house, putting the carpets down himself, while his sister Sarah and Mrs. Barnes superintended. It was only about three blocks from the Barnes residence, and Miss Abbie would occasionally go over, followed by the children, who took great delight in the new premises.

"I wonder if they'll buy a green iron bed or a white one—which do you think would be the prettiest, Abbie?" asked Mrs. Barnes one day.

"I like white, with brass knobs, like Mrs. Howard's; they're a lot prettier than the green ones."

"I expect Philip's girl will want that kind—there comes Uncle Joe now, with a new overcoat on. Why, good morning, Uncle Joe, come right in."

"I come to see if you could go to town with me, to help me buy a stove, one you think would burn good."

"Yes, I'll be glad to go, as soon as I can get ready. How do you like the looks of this stove?" pointing to the one in the sitting room.

"Why, it looks all right. Does it burn good?"

"Oh, it's a splendid stove," said Miss Abbie.

"You like it, do you? Well, we'll try to find one like it," said he, opening the door for Mrs. Barnes to pass out, that lady having made no change in her wearing apparel except to don a dark dress skirt, hat and cloak.

"You look mighty fine in your new overcoat," said Mrs. Barnes, as they neared the gate.

"And I'm going to get me a new suit of clothes for Christmas," said he.

About one block from home they met Willie and Teddy, who had been out for a little walk.

"Let me go to town with you," cried Willie, "me and Ted."

"Do you mind 'em, Uncle Joe?"

"No, let 'em come along."

So Teddy and Willie trotted along beside them till they reached the hardware store, or rather a big store that carried general merchandise.

Mrs. Barnes stepped in and was soon lost to everything else in examining the merits of the different stoves. Presently she heard a wail from Teddy.

"Oh! Oh! My han,' my han'!"

She found that he had opened and closed a stove door on his little fat hand, making a long red mark. After kissing the hand and scolding the child, she was turning again toward the salesman when she discovered Willie in the act of taking the ashpan from the bottom of a coal stove.

"Willie Barnes, what do you mean?" she cried.

"I was just looking how it was made."

"Let it alone and take care of Teddy. You don't give me a chance to see anything."

Again she turned her attention toward the stoves. "This looks like a good one, Uncle Joe. It's not exactly like ours, but very near it."

As Uncle Joe advanced toward the stove in question, there was an awful clatter, a terrible mingling of sound in which Teddy's voice was uppermost. He had run against a pile of loose stove pipes and knocked them over on himself.

"Whatever made me bring the children?" cried Mrs. Barnes, picking Teddy up and shaking him, partly to get the dust off and partly in motherly wrath.

Once more she turned her attention toward the stove; the salesman who was extolling its virtues at a great rate to Uncle Joe, now addressed her: "Yes, ma'am, this stove burns less coal and gives out more heat than any other stove on the market."

Mrs. Barnes was on the point of speaking when she detected Willie, who was standing near her, turning on the generator of a gasoline stove.

"Don't Willie," she said in a suppressed voice, ashamed to attract the attention of the salesman after so much racket from the children. But Willie, either deaf to her words, or willingly disobedient, proceeded to turn on another burner, and so the odor of gasoline was becoming apparent. Dreading to call out and cause another scene, Mrs. Barnes sided over toward Willie, saying as she did so, "Yes sir, I think it's a good stove, very much like mine." Then she gave her recreant son a good, long pinch in the back.

"Oh, oh! What you pinching me for?" exclaimed Willie, leaping about three feet from the floor.

Mrs. Barnes, not expecting this, was covered with confusion. Uncle Joe looked around in wonder, then realizing the situation, laughed outright. The salesman also smiled.

"He was turning the burners on—and—and I had to do something," stammered Mrs. Barnes.

"Yes, I put some gasoline in that stove yesterday, to show a lady how it worked," explained the clerk.

Willie hung his head in real shame for his dis-

obedience, and little Teddy, in mute sympathy, walked up and took him by the hand.

"Did you say you wanted this stove, ma'am?"

"Yes, no—you decide, Uncle Joe. The children have got me so rattled I don't know anything."

"Yes, that's the stove. Send it down to the little new house next to Mrs. Dale's."

And so the purchase was made.

It was Christmas Eve night. The Barnes children were going to bed early, but of course they weren't one bit sleepy, no more than if it was early morning. Their curiosity was too much roused to admit of drowsiness, and yet they knew that old Santa Claus would never come unless they were all sound asleep. Their stockings were hung in a row back of the heating stove. There were six, like little stairsteps, beginning with Tildy's and ending with Helen's baby feet.

Little Minnie's stocking was in its accustomed place.

"Ma," said Tildy that night, "I'm going to hang up one of Minnie's stockings. I know Santa'll want to give her something, too."

"Yes," said her mother with a choke in her voice, "hang it there."

Miss Abbie, like the children, had gone early to her room.

Mr. and Mrs. Barnes were sitting very quietly by the stove; the hands of the clock pointed to ten.

"I wonder if the children are asleep?" said she. He held out his hand to caution her, then rose from his chair and peeped over at the sleeping babe in their own bed, then, followed by his wife, he looked at Ted sleeping in his crib near by. Entering the adjoining room,

he saw Tildy sleeping alone in her bed, and tenderly placed his hand on the vacant pillow beside her.

On another white cot lay Johnny and Willie. "All asleep," he whispered, and then they prepared the Christmas offering.

Bringing a large basket from the kitchen, the stockings were quickly and quietly filled, the presents labeled and distributed. Mrs. Barnes paused a good while at Minnie's stocking, her husband putting his arm around her in silent sympathy.

At last they sought their rest, and the little cottage, so full of sleeping life, unuttered hopes and tender sorrow, was still and silent as the night.

But just as the little clock's hands crawled around to the mark of twelve, a white robed figure came silently in from the little lean-to bedroom and laid a good-sized package at Tildy's place, and a smaller one for each of the others.

Christmas morning dawned bright and beautiful. The sun rose over a snow-white world. Three inches of snow had fallen during the night, and it was still virgin and untracked.

Of course the children were astir with the dawn. First one little head popped up from the pillow and called "Christmas gift!" and then the other little heads popped up, and instantly "Christmas gift!" was echoing all over the house.

"Not a present is to be looked at until you get your clothes on," announced Mrs. Barnes with more authority than usual, and for once they dressed quickly; there was no dwadling over stockings and shoe-buttons—the clothes flew on like magic.

Presently they were comparing presents and chattering like magpies. Exclamations of wonder and words of joy were flying from mouth to mouth.

"This is mine!" "Oh, isn't it lovely!"

"Just look at this! "Here's something else!" and so on, the words ran around, till Tildy, noticing her big package for the first time, cried out, "What's this?"

A moment more and the coveted furs were lying in her lap.

Oh, look ma, it's a set of furs like Carrie Baker's! Oh, I never expected it!"

"Nor I, either," said Mrs. Barnes, looking questioningly at her husband.

"You needn't look at me. I didn't give 'em to her," he said.

"Who did then? Abbie, who do you suppose gave Tildy the furs?"

"How—how do I know, Mrs. Barnes?" It was so hard for Miss Abbie to dissimulate that she looked guilty.

"Abbie, you know something about it. I know you do—but you haven't said a thing about your present."

"You don't mean that new cloak in there on my bed is for me?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly it's for you, and you're to ask no questions."

"Why, Mrs. Barnes, it must have cost a good deal. I don't understand."

"You don't have to understand, just wear it."

Miss Abbie looked the cloak over and over, and could hardly believe such a handsome garment was her own.

"Ma," cried Willie, "guess what's in Minnie's stocking."

"What is it, child?"

"It's a lily, a big white lily. Looks like it had grown there over night."

"It's just like those Mrs. Howard has blooming in her window," observed Johnny.

"Do you reckon Santa put it there?" asked Willie.

"Maybe it was an angel," said Tildy, and the children grew quiet for a moment, lost in wonderment.

"Do your skates fit, boys?" asked their father, as he came in from milking an hour later.

"Just perfect. I don't see how old Santa guessed the size."

"Lay Helen's doll in bed with her so she'll see it when she wakes. It's a wonder she sleeps in all this noise."

"Just listen to Teddy beat his drum. I don't 'spose we can hear ourselves talk all day."

And so the fun ran on while Miss Abbie and Mrs. Barnes were trying to get breakfast.

"Miss Abbie," said Mrs. Barnes, about ten o'clock that day, "I didn't tell you that we were all invited over to Philip's new house to eat dinner today. I wanted to take you and the children by surprise."

"Why, is he already married?"

"Oh no, but his mother is just going to have a Christmas dinner there as a sort of house-warming, you know."

"That'll be real nice."

"And you are to wear the new dress I made you and your new cloak, and fix up your best."

"I'll try to," said Miss Abbie, disappearing into her little bedroom. "I don't hardly know myself," she murmured a little while later, as she put her hat on before the glass.

Presently they were all down to the new house where Philip's mother invited them in and Uncle Joe came forward to greet them in a brand new suit of clothes, his face shining from the effects of soap and water and happiness.

The table was already laid, and all the furniture was bright and new; the stove gave forth a genial warmth.

"How do you like it all?" asked Uncle Joe, looking at Miss Abbie.

"Like it—I think it's a—a the happiest place in the world."

"You do. Would you like to live in a little house like this—have it for your own?"

"Indeed I would, but I'm so lorn and unlucky," adding quickly, "where is Mr. Philip—and his—his girl?"

"They'll be here pretty soon, and the preacher too," said Philip's mother.

"Oh, is it going to be a wedding?"

"I—I guess it is. We want a double wedding."

Miss Abbie, much bewildered, stepped into the other room to lay her cloak and hat on the bed.

"I—I'd like to speak to you a moment," said Uncle Joe, coming close beside her.

And then he began to talk in a low tone and Miss Abbie stood with her hands clasped, almost holding her breath as she listened. Uncle Joe had always been called slow of speech, but now his tongue flew, his words came quick, but low.

"Oh, Mr. Joe, I never thought of it. I'm took so sudden. It's such a surprise, and to think you want to marry me—and have got some money—did you say it was out of some mines?"

"Yes, it was an old mine I put some money in a long time ago, and they just sold it and sent me my share. I intend to go into the grocery business with Philip."

"And this house is yours?"

"Yes, mine, and yours too, if you want it."

"There comes the preacher and Philip and his girl," cried Mrs. Barnes, coming toward them.

"We'll all get married at once, if you say so," said Uncle Joe, imploringly.

But Miss Abbie was too much overcome and bewildered to say anything, so Mrs. Barnes took her by the arm, led her into the other room and stood her up by Mr. Joe, Philip and his sweetheart standing beside them.

The preacher took his place and began to repeat a simple marriage service. When he came to the words, "Abbie Dobbs, do you take this man to be your lawful husband?" she could not answer, her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, she tried to nod her head and looked appealingly toward Mrs. Barnes, who, always ready to help a friend in need, loyally answered, "Yes."

And so this old, obsolete, neglected couple were joined in the holy bonds of matrimony, to comfort and care for each other, to walk hand in hand adown the hill of life, toward the setting sun, no longer alone, no longer unloved.

Following the ceremony was a great feast, to which every guest, especially the Barnes children, did ample justice.

The neighbors, hearing of the affair, came in the afternoon to offer congratulations and celebrate the occasion.

"And you say Miss Abbie never suspected anything of this until today?" asked Mrs. Howard of Mrs. Barnes.

"Not a thing. She's the most innocent minded mortal in the world and I knew she never could get married unless I took the matter in hand and arranged it all for her. She couldn't even say yes."

"And Philip is going to live with his mother, you say?"

"Yes, and just Miss Abbie and Uncle Joe will live here. I couldn't bear to have her far from me. The children love her so much."

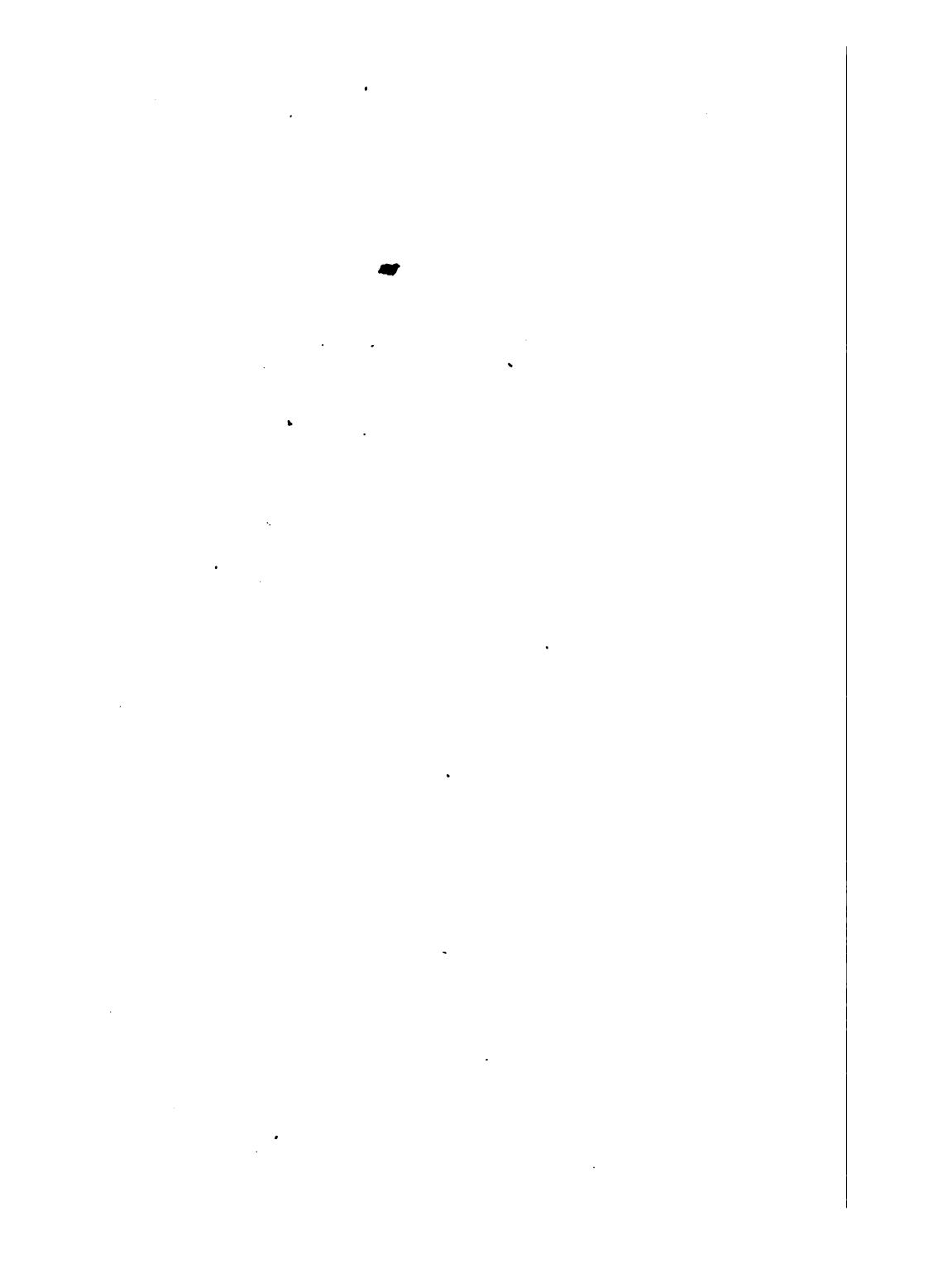
That evening when all the guests were gone except Mrs. Barnes, Miss Abbie stood by her husband's chair, and putting her hand timidly on his old gray head, said:

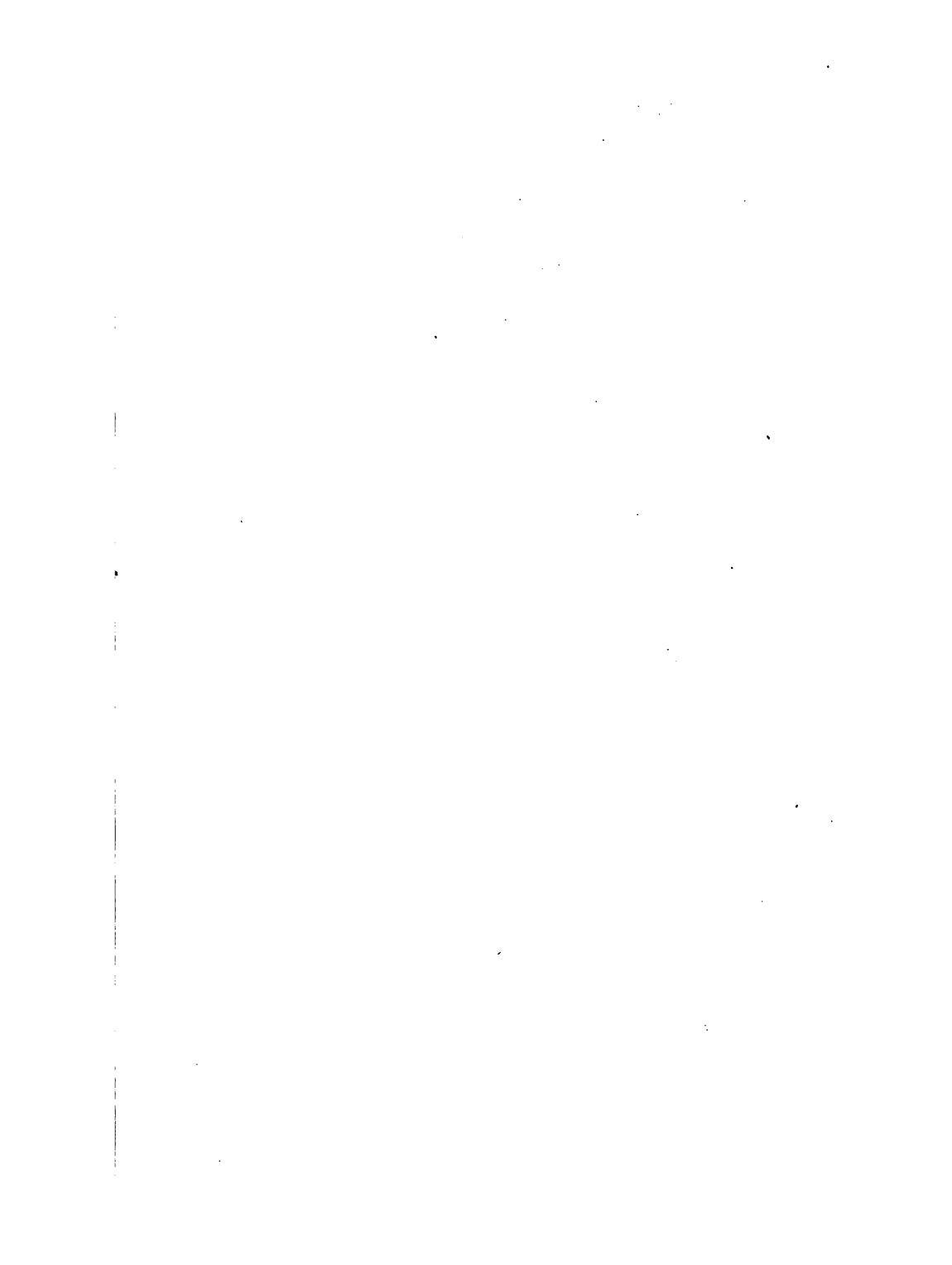
"I don't deserve all this—and to think I used to call myself lone and lorn and unlucky."

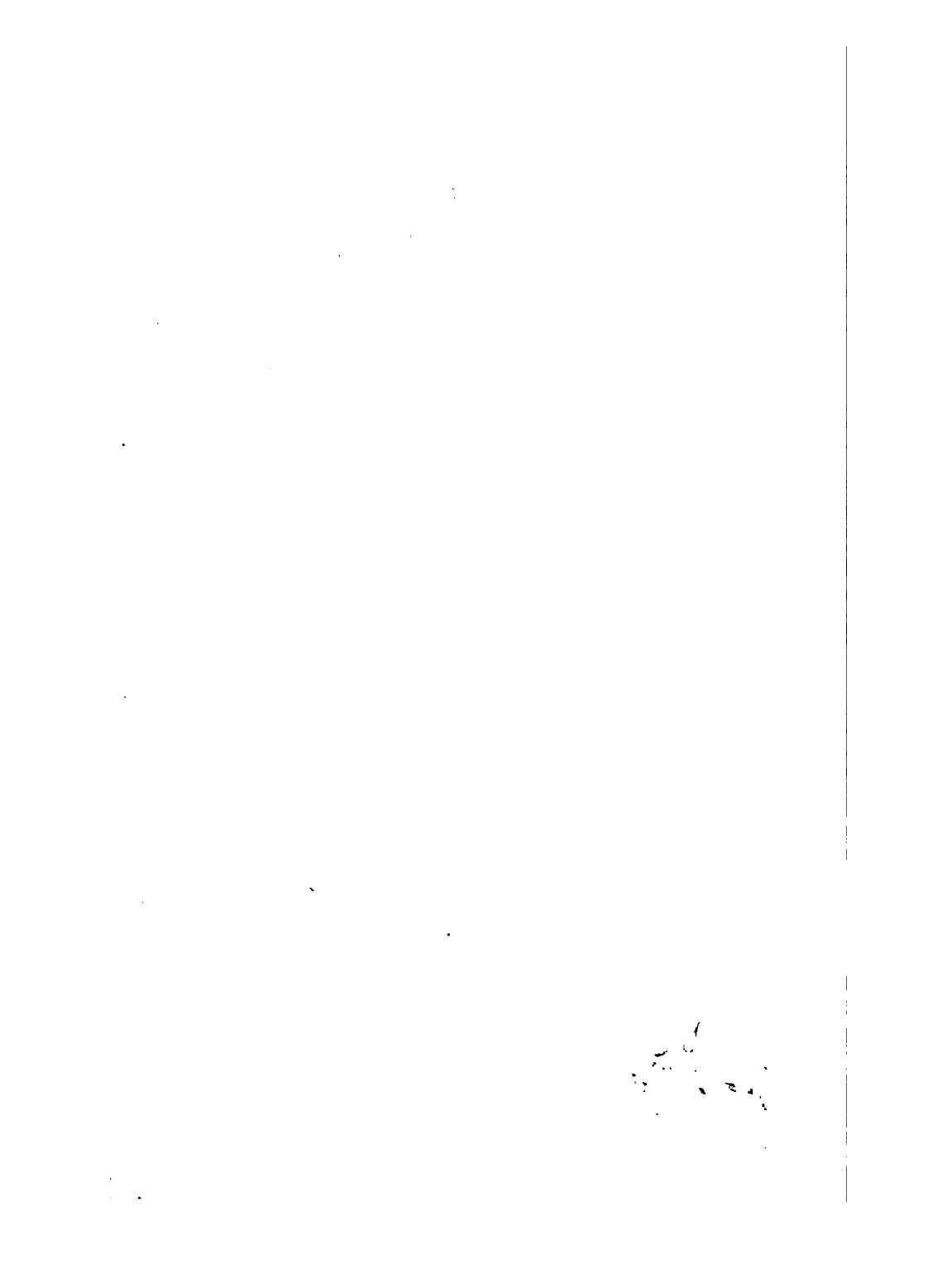
THE END

Failure is the stepping stone on which we climb
To other efforts—higher all the time.
Defeat is but the ground-work, lowly laid,
On which the edifice, Success, is made.

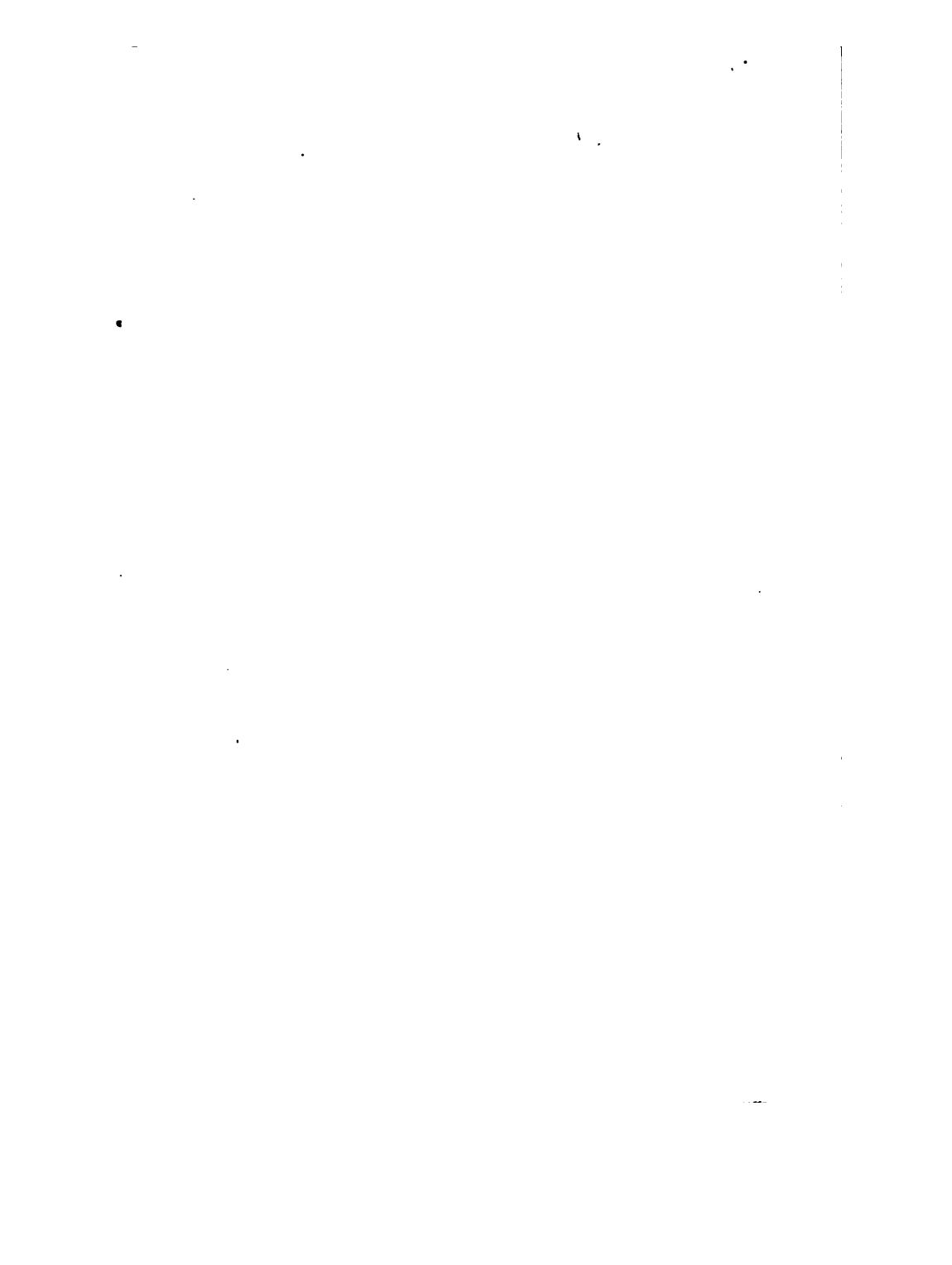


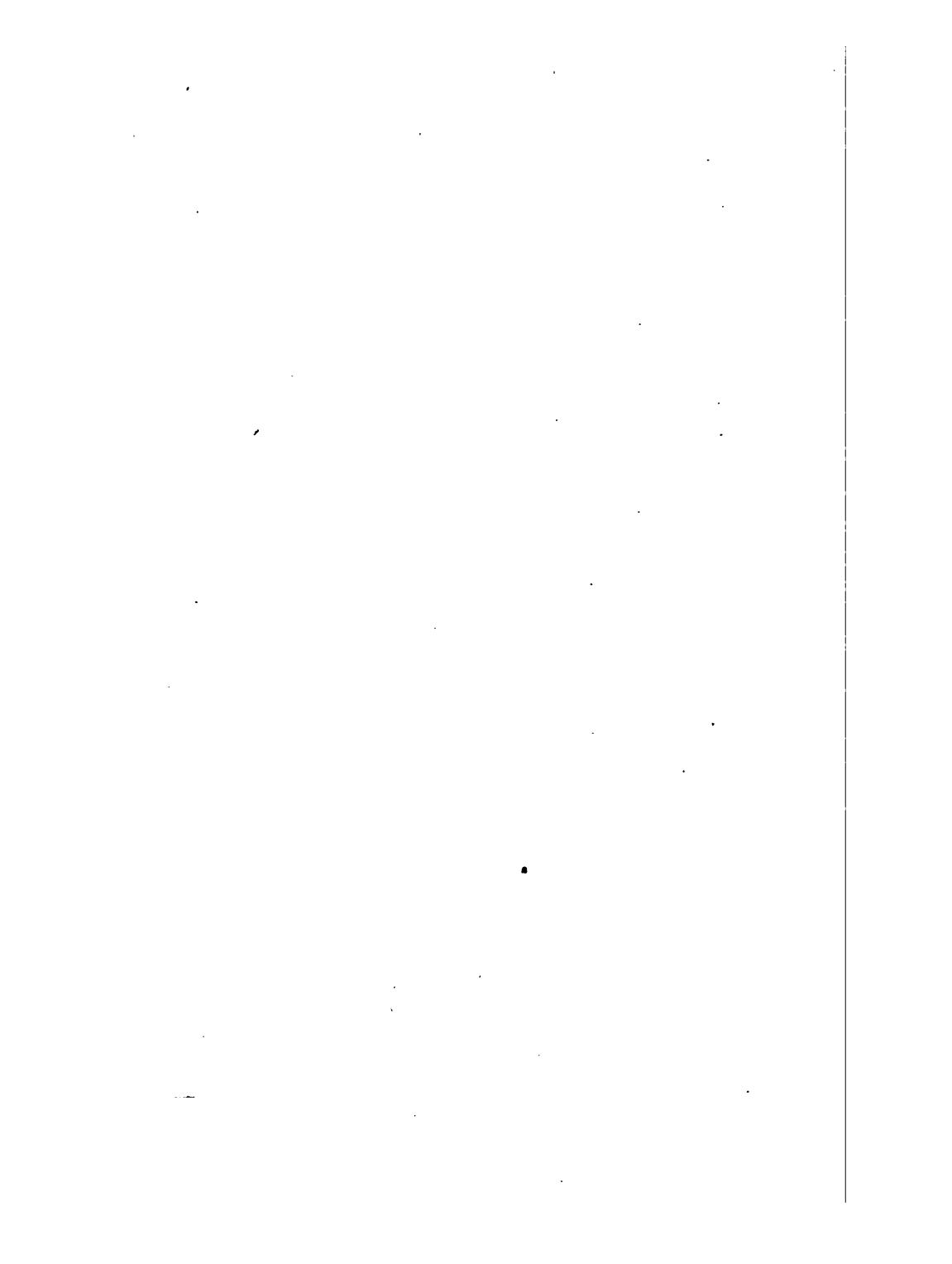






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